From Your Commissioner

COVID-19 (Part 2)

A lot has changed in the last week, and I am sorry to say that none of it has been change for the better. However, many changes have been made in the hope of keeping us all healthy. As I write this column, I know that things are changing rapidly and that they will have changed again by the time this goes to print. The fact remains that to this point the actions of the Governor have helped to keep NH healthier than most states.

While I did not think that a Stay at Home order would be issued last week, it was. As promised, we did provide our list of essential agricultural businesses to the Governor before the order was made. As expected, he did not use our recommendations verbatim, but we believe that he did capture all the sectors we had recommended.

A number of people have called to ask about their particular circumstances and how they should operate. We don’t have the authority to interrupt an order issued by the Governor, but we can provide some basic guidance. As you look at the order, which can be found at NH.gov, you will find that if you are caring for something living, you will be allowed to continue to care for it. If you are in the business of selling those things, either as a live or finished product, you may continue to do so.

The reality is that for production agriculture and everything required to support it, the Governor’s order should not affect your ability to operate as normal. What should change, is how you deal with your customers and your employees. As we continue to see the number of coronavirus cases increase in NH, we will need to be ever mindful of our responsibility to act in a manner which lessens the spread of the disease.

We all need to be thinking of how we handle everything and work to provide safe spacing between our employees and between customers. We can’t always keep six feet away from people when conducting a transaction or even performing our work, but we need to think about what can be done to minimize the possibility of spreading the virus.

Supplies of disposable disinfecting wipes and hand sanitizer are running low, but production of these products are ramping up. Even distilleries are switching from the production of spirits to hand sanitizers. We all owe it to our employees and our customers to be diligent in searching out those products.

One item, which I had been wondering about, came up just this morning. That concern is relative to returnable milk bottles. In some stores, they currently can’t be returned at all. Of course, that is not sustainable for the dairies. However, the returned bottles should not be handled by cashiers who are also handling the items you are purchasing. Dairies, bottling milk need to work with their retailers to find...
a new way to deal with the bottles. Within an hour of hearing about the problem, I had already heard from one farm about two different ways they were getting their bottles back. Whatever the plan is, I hope that customers continue to support these farms.

Americans are resilient and creative. We will find ways to defeat this virus and deal with the problems it throws our way. No one knows just how long this crisis will last, but the virus is not going away. We will have a vaccine for it at some point; hopefully, sooner rather than later, but at least for now our lives have changed dramatically. We will deal with it and we will find a way to get back to work, even though how we do will, no doubt, be much different from how we did that work even three short weeks ago.

Shawn N. Jasper – Commissioner