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COVID-19 and the dairy sector Q&A

Background

The spread of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) is a rapidly developing situation. With considerable effects felt socially and economically across the globe, there is a growing awareness that food production and the dairy sector are facing considerable challenges already. You will know that we are already seeing market volatility in the sector and we are working with the wider supply chain to minimise this disruption and to address on-farm matters. At retail level, demand for milk and dairy products from stockpiling and disruptive consumer behaviour has changed the landscape for supply and demand, with the foodservice sectors dropping off greatly. This has created vulnerability and risk for processors and the supply chain. The potential for reduced staffing levels due to staff sickness or that of their dependants, or imposed self-isolation has clear and broad implications across the supply chain - from shortage of staff at processing facilities, tanker drivers as well as on farms. This issue alone requires contingency planning and members need to be aware of some potential forthcoming issues and plan to take action to control whatever they can under these circumstances.

In this rapidly evolving situation, [the NFUOnline COVID-19 hub](#) has up to date guidance and links for a wide range of cross-sector issues to support members, including:

- [Farm business concerns](#)
- [Government support for businesses](#)
- [Environment and access to the countryside](#)
- [Farmed environment issues](#)
- [Rural issues](#)
- [Looking after wellbeing on farm](#)
- [Impacts on the supply chain](#)

Issues affecting the wider agricultural industry are covered in the above, wider NFU guidance. This briefing has been specifically prepared to guide members through dairy-related issues and aims to answer some of the most common questions being raised. This Q&A is our understanding of the position as at 02 April 2020 and will be updated as required.

If this briefing does not answer your questions, check AHDB's [FAQ's on Coronavirus](#). Contact the dairy team if you cannot find more information on your query in these resources.

Dairy Sector Guidance

Key points to consider

- The NFU have published an [Essential Journey's certificate for farm employees](#) but it is suggested that an employer also provides their employees with their own letter on their company letter head with the employers name and contact details on.
- Ensure you maintain high standards of hygiene and ensure facilities are available for lorry drivers to use, including handwashing and drying facilities with soap.
- Communicate with essential farm visitors to work to a protocol that fits within the social distancing guidance.
- Try and minimise non-essential visitors to the farm and minimise contact with those that do need to visit. Be aware that some companies may have told staff to keep their distance.
- Take stock of your current levels of inputs and outputs which may be affected, planning feed & fertiliser deliveries and access to abattoirs or livestock markets. Also consider other parlour sundries and products.
- We understand a lot of pressure circulates from rumours and hearsay and can reassure you we are engaging with the correct channels to collect accurate and useful information for members, and would urge members to look towards reputable direct sources of information from government, the NHS, the NFU and through official communications with your milk buyer and other industry stakeholders.
- If you have children spending more time at home than usual during this time, be conscious of taking sufficient safety precautions to minimise risk to all on the farm and maintain safety.

On farm

What is the current situation regarding on farm assurance schemes?

Red Tractor Assurance

From the 20th of March 2020, Red Tractor physical, on-farm audits have temporarily been suspended, with an online portal for remote inspections currently being consulted on. It is not expected to be rolled out until Easter. This is across all schemes including the FSA and other enforcement bodies that Red Tractor have earned recognition arrangements with until further notice. This also includes unannounced audits. Representatives from the national dairy board and other sector boards will be supporting in the practical development of remote auditing, alongside UKAS and other certification bodies. Red Tractor will communicate to scheme members when and how inspections move to a remote audit in due course. Despite the suspension of physical audits, adherence to Red Tractor standards is as critical as ever.

When the remote assessment is established, farms in high risk categories will be prioritised.

This does not affect annual membership renewal of your certificate and scheme members should seek to renew the certificate as normal. For further information, visit [Red Tractor's COVID-19 Hub](#).

What is the current situation with veterinary medicines, feed and fuel in the UK, do we have enough? Should I start stockpiling?

Following ongoing dialogue with key stakeholders, the NFU is confident that there is an ample supply of fuel, feed and veterinary medicines as it stands. There are not currently any indications that supply chains in these areas are at risk of being stunted or creating shortages. As witnessed over the past few weeks, stockpiling is not a helpful exercise and does not enable everyone fair access to products they require. By not engaging in this behaviour, the supply chain will maintain resilience and be able to adapt and flex more smoothly in this ongoing situation.

What if my supplier of sand or other materials and inputs are supposed to be closing?

We are maintaining an ongoing dialogue with suppliers, local and other authorities and at present, there is adequate supply of bedding sand available, with suppliers remaining open, with no reason to believe that shortages will occur. At present, we would suggest again not to engage in panic buying behaviours but to ensure farm provisions are at sufficient levels for the immediate future and that storage plans have been considered.

We have heard concerns from members surrounding on farm construction works being halted due to builders merchants being closed and reduced staffing levels. This cross-sector issue has been raised and guidance will be updated shortly.

I'm concerned about access to parlour sundries, PPE and cleaning equipment – what should I do?

PPE and cleaning issues are scarce throughout the supply chain, with many vets practices and other industries being asked to divert disposable PPE to the NHS. On farm, washable gloves and aprons and wellies are acceptable providing they're cleaned regularly (follow our cleaning protocol which can be [accessed here](#))

If you are concerned around parlour sundries stocks being low, please make your regional NFU representative aware. Whilst we are only hearing minor delays in access to wipes and other products, we appreciate the necessity of such products for udder health and hygiene. If possible, use reusable and washable/sterilisable products and ensure to maintain a dialogue with your usual supplier, planning ahead as to how long your current stocks are expected to last.

What is happening with TB testing?

We understand that different veterinary practices are taking different action with regards to whether they will undertake TB tests and further clarity on test prioritisation and protocol is expected in the coming days.

We recognise the difficulties surrounding maintaining social distancing when TB testing and the NFU are producing guidance on hygiene protocols for working with on farm visitors such as vets, during this time.

APHA's current position is that TB testing should only continue if, in the OV's judgement, it can be done safely in accordance with current [COVID-19 public health advice](#). The BVA and British

Cattle Veterinary Association (BCVA) have both published guidance for vets continuing to TB test, and how it might be done safely and members should have a conversation with their respective veterinary practices to plan for this, disclosing in full if they have suspected COVID-19 symptoms. For further information on licensing, testing and other concerns, please see the [TB Hub](#).

The most recent updates to guidance from the APHA are:

- APHA have temporarily suspended DRF visits to farms until further notice and instead will be conducting these disease report forms through the telephone.
- APHA have consolidated the processing of TB reactor cattle to three slaughterhouses in England and Wales, in order to ensure the most efficient use of slaughterhouse staff and PPE.

Any other animal health and welfare queries should be covered by the [NFU's animal health and welfare guidance](#).

What about milk recording and testing?

NMR and CIS are still aiming to provide a milk recording service, however through a DIY milk recording service where possible. If this is not possible, with adequate observation made to ensure social distancing and correct hygiene practices, in some instances assisted milk recording may go ahead. Both companies suggest contacting local area managers if you have specific queries, whilst their websites have published information and statements. For NMR services [follow this link](#) and for CIS, more information can be [found here](#).

Collection and processing of milk

What are my options if my milk buyer cannot collect my milk or pay me?

Unfortunately we have now seen some issues surrounding collection of milk and delays in payment being proposed.

Prior to these potential events occurring, ensure that you fully scrutinise your milk contract for clauses relating to supply and force majeure so you know the options and engage with your milk buyer about potential issues which may occur. The NFU are aware that processors are developing their contingency plans to minimise disruption to farmers and the supply chain but are aware of the implications of access to labour if tanker drivers become affected by COVID-19. This section will be updated as we gain further information in this area.

A briefing on [supply contracts and COVID-19 has been prepared by the NFU Legal Team, which outlines force majeure and other key supply clauses](#).

If you have been affected by non-collection of milk or have concerns around not being paid or the legality of a processors behaviour, please direct your queries to the NFU CallFirst team who can flag your concerns with the LAS team if required.

Will my insurance cover failed milk collections?

This query is currently being pursued but the NFU has been advised that if milk is physically unable to be collected, members should check their insurance policies to gauge whether they have an Uncollected Milk extension. NFU Mutual will pay for damage and loss of income

arising from the inability of a dairy or its agent to collect milk under a contract, resulting in the milk being wasted or spoiled. If the dairy or agent are affected by the coronavirus outbreak e.g. drivers are ill or government restricts movement, and they are unable to collect the milk, then any damage or loss of income should be covered under this extension. We are exploring whether Full Business Interruption covers COVID-19 since it is was declared a notifiable disease.

There is some understanding that if milk is not collected through unwillingness to collect, or alternative arrangements can be made, instead of physical incapability to collect milk, then this may not be covered by some insurers.

Please check your individual cover and speak to your insurance company to confirm your policies and extensions.

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Please check your individual cover and speak to your insurance company to confirm your policies and extensions.

What if I can't store my milk?

The government have [long-standing guidance](#) regarding storing and spreading of milk under exceptional circumstances that [can be found here](#). The guidance recommends working with neighbouring farms and ensuring you have a contingency plan in place. It also recommends other options including disposing of the milk at an accredited anaerobic digestion plant, with spreading on low run-off risk land as a last resort. Consider alternative storage arrangements instead and where possible, minimise slurry production through using low volume pressure hoses in parlour wash-downs or consider making changes to a production system including moving to straw bed systems to produce solid manure instead. With the current situation in mind, there are not currently any official statements from the Environmental Agency or Natural England on this matter but the guidance states that anyone who cannot avoid spreading slurry and there is risk of breaching legal requirements of NVZ's and SSAFO rules, must contact the Environment Agency. The NFU are liaising with them and the wider industry to determine alternative options for milk that has not been collected.

The NFU have produced a briefing on advice for members on storage and disposal of milk on farm and this Q&A will shortly be updated to direct members to the briefing.

I have contracted COVID-19 – what if my tanker driver won't collect milk?

It is important to follow public health guidance in how to self-treat COVID-19 and following hygiene protocols on handwashing and limiting the spread of the disease. To minimise the risk

of tanker drivers refusing to collect milk, we have produced protocol for visitors on farm, to keep everyone safe. This applies to farmers, farm staff, tanker drivers, vets and any other visitors. [Access the protocols here](#). For an on farm parlour cleaning and disinfectant checklist to manage cleaning schedules, [download it here](#). This is to ensure hygiene guidance is standardised for our members, maintaining the safety of farmers and the tanker drivers in being able to do their job and minimising the risk of spreading COVID-19. It is important to not make contact with tanker drivers or other on-farm visitors, adhering to social distancing measures and taking all reasonable precautions to disinfect all areas that you may have come in contact with on the farm, prior to any other person touching them. Remember to ensure there is access to hot and cold running water, soap and hand drying facilities – this is a HSE requirement for delivery drivers. Cleaning down facilities with antibacterial cleaner after different individuals have used them will aid in limiting the spread of COVID-19.

Members should ensure contingency planning for staffing and relief milkers to assist if they are unable to work, due to COVID-19 and self-isolation.

With the drop-in food service dairy requirements, can't the milk just be diverted to retailers? What are retailers doing to support this?

The NFU is liaising closely with the supply chain to find workable solutions to the changing shifts in demand in the retail and food service sectors and ensuring we are best positioned to support farmers who may be affected by implications of processors losing food service contracts, or dealing with increased demand at processing sites. Members can be assured that the NFU is engaged daily in conversations with processors to ensure the sustainability of the dairy sector and to protect member businesses from any flux. With the government announcement of relaxing of competition laws for retailers during these exceptional circumstances, there is greater flexibility for retailers to share and pool resources, staff and information to ensure the maintenance of dairy supply chains. Industry co-operation is essential to protect the supply of dairy products to the consumer and a widening of the temporary rules relaxation is being proposed to enable responsible and necessary collaborative action. For further information and analysis on dairy and the food service sector, read this AHDB briefing: [dairy and the food service sector](#).

I want to help my local community – can I just sell my milk locally now from the tank?

There are strict hygiene controls that must be considered when selling milk (or any raw food product) to the public and proper precautions and Food Standards Agency guidance must be followed. There is also an official registration process that must be applied for before being able to sell raw milk, which requires visits from Dairy Hygiene inspectors and various samples to be taken. With the current movement restrictions on persons not in a “key worker” category, it is understood that any non-essential movements or work will not be undertaken during this time. So, it is expected that these processes will be prioritised for new businesses, under limited movement rules. Furthermore, there may be contractual limitations through your usual processor through selling in this way, always check your contract thoroughly before considering making any changes to how you sell your milk. For further information, [the FSA have guidance on their website](#).

I'd like to know more about markets, what is happening with the milk price, international trends and consumption figures, where can I find this information?

[The AHDB](#) provide up to date information on all of the above, as well as providing frequent analysis and reports to give context to what we are currently witnessing in [dairy markets](#). They

also have a [COVID-19 hub](#) and specific [dairy and livestock FAQ's](#) – take a look if you aren't able to find answers to your queries here.

Additional support available from the NFU

Regional NFU contacts are there to provide assistance and can direct your queries and concerns through to NFU HQ Dairy Team as required. Contact your County Adviser for local issues.

The Specialist Advisers at NFU CallFirst provide free initial legal advice and guidance, and will be able to assist members with the potential contractual issues that may arise in relation to coronavirus. NFU CallFirst can be contacted on 0370 845 8458.

If you require more detailed independent legal advice in your particular circumstances, then NFU CallFirst can refer you to one of the NFU's legal panel firms. NFU Farmer & Grower members receive a 12.5% discount on the hourly rates of the legal panel firms for work relating to their farming businesses.

If you subscribe to the Legal Assistance Scheme (LAS), then you may be eligible for a contribution towards the professional fees you incur in resolving a dispute relating to your supply contract following an extreme weather event. For more information about the LAS, and to find out whether you are a subscriber, contact NFU CallFirst on 0370 845 8458.

Other support available

Charity helplines remain open to offer support to you, your families and employees.

FCN: 03000 111 999

RABI 0808 281 9490

DPJ Foundation: 0800 587 4262

YANA: 0300 3230 400

Farmwell have published useful [personal resilience guidance](#).

What the NFU Dairy Team are doing to help our members

- Daily engagement with other UK unions and key industry stakeholders across the supply chain to be aware of key concerns and raise issues and developments through to government level
- Daily contact with Defra teams, sharing member and supply chain concerns and asks, including:
 1. Derogation to relax drivers' hours regulations.
 2. Recognition of farmers and those working in food production, distribution and processing are included on government's "key workers" list.
 3. Financial support to businesses and industry for sector sustainability.
 4. Relaxation of rules to enable industry collaboration and resource pooling and diverting.
- Sharing key developments through continual dialogue with regional colleagues to disseminate through to all members and also gain feedback from farms.

The voice of British farming

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NFU supported by



- Sharing useful links and announcements through Twitter @NFU_Dairy and NFUOnline
- Seeking legal advice and guidance from the NFU Legal Affairs Team
- Monitoring markets and engaging with AHDB to obtain up to date market information
- Continually looking for ways to further support our members – sign up to our weekly Dairy Focus newsletter by emailing NFUdairyfocus@nfu.org.uk to register.