To: Governor Walz
From: Deputy Commissioner Vaubel, Department of Agriculture and Deputy Commissioner Warfa, Department of Employment and Economic Development, on behalf of the Committee on the Safety, Health, and Wellbeing of Agricultural and Food Processing Workers
Re: Workplan
Date: August 1, 2021

# Workplan of the Governor’s Committee on the Safety, Health and Wellbeing of Agricultural and Food Processing Workers

**Background**

In March 2021, the Governor established via Executive Order 21-14 the Governor’s Committee on the Safety, Health, and Wellbeing of Agricultural and Food Processing Workers to address COVID-related and long-term issues related to agricultural and food processing workers in Minnesota. The committee has 15 members representing state agencies, community groups, labor, employers, and public health. The Committee has been meeting since April 2021, and in fulfillment of the direction of EO 21-14, submits this workplan to the Governor.

**Meeting History & Administration**

All meetings have taken place virtually, beginning with the inaugural meeting on April 27, 2021. The committee has reviewed open meeting laws, established a [public website](https://mn.gov/deed/programs-services/awwc/) and a regular meeting schedule twice a month. The Committee also adopted a nickname and acronym: Agricultural Worker Wellness Committee (AWWC).

Early meetings provided updates on vaccine distribution and asked for input and feedback on vaccine plans. The committee also reviewed state agency roles and responsibilities. Staff at MDA, MDH, and DEED are supporting the committee.

**Committee Objectives**
The committee’s overall objective is to, by December 1, 2021, provide recommendations for state policy and legislative changes to relevant state agencies, to be considered for communication to the Governor’s Office for inclusion in budget and policy proposals.

There are five objectives outlined in the [Executive Order](https://mn.gov/governor/assets/EO%2021-14%20Final_tcm1055-472838.pdf) paraphrased below:

1. Coordinate resources and outreach in 2021 related to the pandemic
2. Support and assist with vaccination, testing, access to health care, etc. for workers
3. Design a proactive strategy to deploy public, private and nonprofit compliance resources to protect and promote health, safety, and wellbeing. Focus on housing, transportation and workplaces.
4. Develop a communications system between agencies, employers, workers, their families and communities, community organizations, advocacy groups, etc.
5. Provide a forum for all these groups to engage, collect and analyze data and information, coordinate resources and plan for the future.

**Committee Priorities**

Committee members were surveyed in May 2021 to establish priorities in alignment with the objectives in the EO. The [survey results are summarized here](https://mn.gov/deed/assets/summary-survey-results-themes_tcm1045-483205.pdf), with key themes emerging around:

* Data
	+ Defining agricultural and seasonal worker types
	+ Better understanding of who and how many workers
	+ Shared data and information among agencies and organizations
* Housing
	+ Health and safety concerns
	+ Overcrowding and the pandemic
	+ Jurisdiction and enforcement depends on type of housing
	+ Migrant Labor Camps and employer provided housing
* Agency coordination and capacity
	+ Identifying gaps in enforcement and jurisdiction
	+ Capacity of current staffing levels
* Outreach and communications
	+ Difficulty connecting workers to support
	+ Lack of translated materials, relying on “scholarly” written English
	+ Mistrust and unease

**Next Steps**

The Committee will continue with large group meetings on the four priority areas, learning from each other about programs/services/gaps/opportunities and when needed requesting experts and organizations to share ideas and resources. As the COVID-19 pandemic evolves, the Committee will continue to provide input and recommendations for vaccines while shifting focus to long-term and structural issues. A cross-agency group of staff from MDA, MDH, and DEED will continue staffing the committee and support the development of policy proposals and recommendations for December 2021