

USDA COVID-19 PLAYBOOK version 7.0

Supplement to Pandemic Plans, Occupant Emergency Plans & Continuity of Operations Plans

Effective as of 12/4/2020 4:35 PM until further notice.

REOPENING USDA FACILITIES

USDA provides critical services and serves as the nation’s backbone for protecting natural resources such as forests and grasslands, continuity of vital agricultural and food supply, affordable access to energy and clean drinking water, and other services that ensure a thriving rural economy. This playbook was created as a result of White House guidance issued on April 20, 2020 “[Opening America Up Again](#)”, a three-phased approach based on the advice of public health experts. USDA has created this framework in order to guide how Mission Areas and Agencies must analyze, sequence, and implement decisions that enable employees to gradually return to their respective onsite functions effectively and safely. To date, USDA has worked to balance delivery of our critical mission with adapting to the everyday challenges COVID-19 presents to our employees, customers, and the American people.

The term “onsite” refers to the individual and local facility, location, or environment that employees must return to resume delivery of missions.

Mission Areas and its Agencies should coordinate internally within USDA to ensure consistent interpretation and communication.

12/3/20 update: Updated are highlighted in yellow and are intended to reflect new guidance from the CDC.

The USDA COVID Playbook follows CDC’s guidance as it pertains to the operations of our facilities, and the playbook is updated regularly. As the pandemic continues to be a dynamic situation and CDC continues to update all guidance related to COVID-19, we recommend employees continue to refer to the [CDC’s COVID-19](#) site for the latest updates on definitions, best practices, and research.

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FACTORS TO CONSIDER BEFORE REOPENING

Criteria – Where a community or state has met the “gating” criteria for the [Opening Up America Again](#) including [OMB guidance Aligning Federal Agency Operations with the National Guidelines for Opening Up America Again](#), decisions to begin to resume operations at USDA facilities may be informed by the following:

1. State or community compliance in which the facility is located with [federal gating criteria](#) and whether the state or community has begun implementing phased in reopening of public and commercial activities;
2. The duty station state or community in which the facility is located has lifted mandatory travel and closure restrictions, and;
3. Facility has appropriate face coverings or masks, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), and cleaning supplies and services and the facility has a plan to ensure sufficient social hygiene practices are in place to protect employees, contractors, and the public. Mission Areas should plan on providing face coverings or masks to all onsite employees from Phase 1 through Phase 3. Please coordinate with your Mission Area’s Chief Operating Officer if your facility is having trouble acquiring face coverings, masks, or cleaning supplies.

Reopening Coordination – Mission Areas and Agencies (Missions/Agencies) are responsible for overseeing, coordinating and reporting the implementation status of these actions.

1. Considerations: Before reopening a USDA facility, Mission/Agency and facility leaders should:
 - a) Ensure that all Criteria above have been considered. USDA’s [COVID 19 Dashboard](#) should be used to assist in the decision whether it is appropriate to reopen.
 - b) Determine whether the facility’s reopening is necessary to fully serve constituents, ensure high-quality customer service, and support USDA’s mission.
 - c) Establish appropriate workforce schedule and meeting protocol (e.g., alternate schedules, etc.), if needed, to ensure Mitigation Practices can be implemented.
 - d) Assess the ability to practice social distancing within the facility at each phase.
 - e) Determining additional equipment or supplied needed to comply with [CDC](#) and [OSHA](#) guidelines and best practices (follow [GSA guidance](#) when in a GSA facility).
 - f) Review labor agreements to determine collective bargaining obligations.

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2. Determine whether the facility has established sufficient plans and procedures to ensure social distancing and hygiene practices are in place to protect employees, contractors, and the public. This may also include additional safety procedures for Agencies that substantially interface with the public.
3. Mission Area/Agency leadership should coordinate with existing groups, such as the Facility Security Committees (FSC) and the General Services Administration (when applicable), who are charged with making certain decisions concerning facility-wide health and safety measures. Coordination should occur in buildings where a Mission Area or Agency is co-located with another tenant (USDA, federal, or otherwise).
4. Note that this document is intended to guide decision-making for domestic USDA offices. For USDA staff overseas, USDA will coordinate closely with the State Department and will follow Chief of Mission guidance to determine reopening status.
5. Communication with Returning Employees: Supervisors and leadership should communicate to employees and provide a reasonable amount of advanced notice (7 calendar days) of expected return. If the 7th day falls on a weekend, employees are expected to return the next business day. Employees do not have to wait 7 days to come back and are able to come back sooner if they choose.

Mitigation Actions – Mission Area/Agency and facility leadership should follow federal, state and local recommendations aimed at mitigating the spread of COVID-19, including but not limited to the following:

1. [OSHA GUIDELINES](#)- OSHA provides COVID-19 planning guidance based on traditional infection prevention and industrial hygiene practices. It focuses on the need for employers to implement engineering, administrative, and work practice controls and personal protective equipment (PPE), as well as considerations for doing so.
2. **FACE COVERINGS AND PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)** – So long as federal, state or local guidelines are in place regarding face coverings and PPE and prior to return, the facility should issue employees and contractors returning to work appropriate face covering. Employees and contractors are always expected to follow face covering and PPE instructions while onsite¹.
3. **MONITOR HEALTH** – Onsite employees and contractors should be instructed to diligently monitor their health, including:
 - a) If an employee exhibits COVID-19 related symptoms or is not feeling well, the employee should not be at work onsite until all symptoms subside and the employee is feeling better.

¹ “Onsite” refers to the local facility, location, or environment that employees and contractors must return to resume mission delivery or normal operations.

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- b) Employees and contractors should consider taking their temperature daily before going to work. If someone has a fever above 100.4 degrees (F) they should stay home and consult a physician for further medical instruction.
- c) If an employee or contractor knows he/she has been in direct contact with a person while that person is infected with COVID-19, the person should **follow CDC guidance**.

4. SOCIAL HYGIENE and CLEANING PROTOCOLS–

- a) Hand Hygiene – Employees should follow and promote [CDC Guidance](#) on Hand Washing, including:
 - i. In addition to normal hygiene, [wash hands](#) more often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially after being in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
 - ii. If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Cover all surfaces of hands and rub them together until they feel dry. Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
 - iii. Facilities should ensure that adequate hygiene supplies are available onsite to ensure proper Mitigation Practices.
- b) **Proper Facility Cleaning** - Follow CDC Guidance for Operating Procedures and Cleaning, including:
 - i. Facilities should increase and make more frequent cleaning that is typically conducted in non-pandemic situations and communicate this schedule to employees.
 - ii. Ensure that common areas, including elevators and bathrooms, and regularly touched surfaces are cleaned frequently.
 - iii. **If someone is sick onsite or tests positive at the facility, [enhanced CDC cleaning protocols](#) should be followed or the impacted portion of the facility can be closed for the CDC recommended period of time.**
- c) Social Distancing - Follow and promote [CDC Guidance](#) for Practicing Social Distancing, including:
 - i. To the greatest extent possible, ensure that the workplace allows for employees, contractors, and, if permitted, visitors to maintain a distance of 6 feet apart. Provide floor markings to encourage this distance is maintained.
 - ii. At a minimum, adhere to local jurisdiction’s guidance on crowd and meeting limits.
 - iii. Continue to promote the use of virtual communications and A/V technology.
- d) Manage Facility Access²
 - i. Consider closure of break rooms and other areas where people could cluster or congregate including entrances and exits to the facilities, and other measures to limit group exposures.
- e) Visual Cues and Signage

² For facilities not controlled by USDA, ensure that proper coordination regarding access occurs with facility management.

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- i. Ensure that appropriate instructions regarding mitigation practices are well marked with signage that is strategically placed in common areas, office space and elevators. Examples of signage are included in [ATTACHMENT B](#).

PHASES OF REOPENING

Tools and Guidance referenced in each Phase

- [CDC Definition of High Risk of Illness from COVID-19](#)
- [CDC Guidance on Community Related Exposure](#)
- [CDC Quarantine Guidance](#)
- [USDA COVID Dashboard](#)
- [USDA Mask Policy](#)
- [USDA Contact Tracing Questionnaire](#)
- [Department of Homeland Security \(DHS\) Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency \(CISA\) Memo on Mission Criticality](#)
 - [CDC Guidance on COVID-19 Critical Infrastructure Sector Response Planning](#)

GATING PERIOD- Agencies should continue maximum telework status.

Use USDA's [COVID 19 Dashboard](#) to review a locality's COVID-19 positive cases and trends. The dashboard and state and local gating period determinations will inform agency actions.

PHASE ONE- Agencies should lift mandatory telework

1. **ELIGIBLE FOR RETURN TO ONSITE MISSION** - To the extent possible and with appropriate practices in place, a USDA facility is permitted to reopen, **but telework should still be widely practiced**. Agencies collocated with another USDA agency or federal department need to coordinate to ensure facility capacity is kept to a minimum and maximum social distancing is still possible. Mission Areas should prioritize the return of employees and contractors who cannot telework, are deemed mission-critical or are customer-facing.
 - a) Telework should be maintained for employees who are at risk of severe illness from COVID-19 who have self-certified to their higher-risk status and have requested telework as an accommodation.
 - b) Employees who are at a higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 who have self-certified to their higher-risk status, who are receiving weather and safety leave, can continue to receive weather and safety through Phase 2.
 - c) Agencies may take an employee's caregiving responsibilities into consideration when assessing telework status.
2. **ONSITE PRACTICES AND CONSIDERATIONS**
 - a) The number and on-site positioning of employees and contractors returning to work can be determined based on the ability to follow all Social Hygiene and Cleaning Protocols including

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- the use of appropriate PPE. Common areas and break areas should not be used for gatherings.
- b) Staggering of employee schedules to promote social distancing and/or creating rotating groups of employees who alternate schedules, etc.
 - c) No commercial food service or retail vendors are allowed on-site. Vending machines may be available and restocked and must be cleaned regularly.
3. **COMMUNICATION OF STATUS**
- a) Mission areas/Agencies will maintain the established COVID-19 communications clearance process. The communication clearance process is included in [ATTACHMENT C](#).
4. **VISITOR CONSIDERATIONS**
- a) Visitors are strongly discouraged. Where mission delivery requires visitors onsite, restrict visitors to essential, time-sensitive, scheduled visits only and require all visitors to be escorted at all times and limit visitor access to non-essential areas of the USDA.
 - b) Prior to arrival at a USDA facility, all visitors should be screened based on health concerns or recent travel. Facilities should use the visitor screening process included as [ATTACHMENT A](#).
 - c) Visitors must adhere to the community PPE³, hygiene, and social distancing guidelines.
5. **TRAVEL CONSIDERATIONS**
- a) Only mission essential, time sensitive business travel will be considered. Any local requirements for quarantining upon return from travel should be followed.
6. **MOVING TO THE NEXT PHASE** – A facility may consider moving to Phase Two of Reopening if the following occur:
- a) The facility operates at Phase One for at least *14 consecutive days* from date of initial reopening with no new cases of COVID 19 onsite;
 - b) The capacity of local public transportation and status of public schools, day care, etc., has been assessed and accounted for in planning.
 - c) To move to the next Phase, the facility coordinates with the Mission/Agency on the intention to move to the next Phase using the same process noted in [Reopening Coordination](#).

PHASE TWO- Agencies should lift maximum telework

1. **ELIGIBLE FOR RETURN TO ONSITE MISSION-** To the extent possible, and with appropriate practices in place, Agency Heads (or their designee) reopen with additional employees and contractors returning and resuming mission onsite. These employees and contractors should be composed of the workforce that have a practical and operational need to be onsite to ensure customer service and delivery of USDA's mission.

³ Visitors must provide their own PPE and follow all facility mitigation practices.

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- a) Telework should be maintained for employees who are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 who have self-certified to their higher-risk status and have requested telework as an accommodation.
- b) Employees who are at a higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 who have self-certified to their higher-risk status, who are receiving weather and safety leave, can continue to receive weather and safety through Phase 2.
- c) Agencies may take an employee's caregiving responsibilities into consideration when assessing telework status.

2. **ONSITE PRACTICES AND CONSIDERATIONS**

- a) The number and on-site positioning of employees and contractors returning to work must be determined based on the ability to follow all Social Hygiene and Cleaning Protocols and provide sufficient PPE.
- b) Common and break areas remain closed for gathering.
- c) Grab & Go food service and no-contact retail vendors may operate on-site at USDA controlled facilities.
- d) Vending machines may be available and restocked and cleaned regularly.

3. **COMMUNICATION**

- a) Mission Areas/Agencies will maintain the established COVID-19 communications clearance process. The communication clearance process is included in [ATTACHMENT C](#).

4. **VISITOR CONSIDERATIONS**

- a) Restrict visitors to essential, time-sensitive, scheduled visits only, require visitors to be escorted at all times and limit visitor access to non-essential areas of the USDA.
- b) Prior to arrival, all visitors will be screened based on health concerns or recent travel. Missions, agencies and offices should use the visitor screening process included as [ATTACHMENT A](#).
- c) Visitors must adhere to the community recommended PPE, hygiene, and social distancing guidelines. Visitors may be required to wear their own face covering and be subjected to follow onsite safety procedures.

5. **TRAVEL CONSIDERATIONS**

- a) Only mission essential, time sensitive business travel will be considered. Any local requirements for quarantining upon return from travel should be followed.

6. **MOVING TO THE NEXT PHASE** – A facility may consider moving to Phase Three of Reopening if all of the following have been met:

- a) The facility operates at Phase Two for 14 consecutive days with no new cases of COVID 19 onsite;
- b) The capacity of local public transportation and status of public schools, day care, etc., have been assessed and considered.

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- c) To move to the next Phase, the facility coordinates with the Mission/Agency on the intention to move to the next Phase using the same process noted in [Reopening Coordination](#).

PHASE THREE- Operational Optimization

1. **ELIGIBLE FOR RETURN TO THE FACILITY** – Agency Head (or their designee) is permitted to reopen with *up to 100%* of their employees and contractors returning and resuming onsite mission delivery. If onsite environment or facility includes co-location with other agencies, ensure planning and coordination to ensure trajectory towards normal operations.
 - a) Telework is permitted for employees and contractors who are telework capable and can perform their duties and meet mission needs from home.
 - b) Employees who are at a higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 who have self-certified to their higher-risk status may request to continue teleworking with their supervisor.
 - o Higher Risk Employees: Employees who are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 ([older adults](#) and [people with certain medical conditions](#)) may self-certify in all three Phases. Higher risk employees must provide the self-certification in writing to their supervisor. The self-certification requirement is separate from the formal reasonable accommodation process. Employees at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 who seek an accommodation when normal operations resume (after Phase 3 ends) should follow the reasonable accommodation process for their mission area/agency/office.
 - o Employees who are not at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19: Employees who are not at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 and who seek an accommodation for a disability should follow the reasonable accommodation [DR 4300-008](#) and their mission area or offices procedures.
 - c) Agencies may take an employee’s caregiving responsibilities into consideration when assessing telework status.
2. **ONSITE PRACTICES**
 - a) The number and on-site positioning of employees and contractors returning to work must be determined based on the ability to follow all Social Hygiene and Cleaning Protocols and having the necessary PPE.
 - b) Common areas and break areas can reopen so long as proper social distancing can be ensured.
 - c) Grab & Go food service, vending machines and no-contact retail vendors may operate on-site.
3. **COMMUNICATION**
 - a) Mission Areas/Agencies will maintain the established COVID-19 communications clearance process. The communication clearance process is included in [ATTACHMENT C](#).
4. **VISITOR CONSIDERATIONS**

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- a) Scheduled, precleared visitors may be allowed. Visitors should be escorted at all times and limit visitor access to non-essential areas of the USDA.
- b) Prior to arrival at a USDA facility, all visitors should be screened based on health concerns or recent travel. Missions, agencies and offices should use the visitor screening process included in [ATTACHMENT A](#).
- c) Visitors must adhere to the community recommended PPE guidelines. Visitors may be required to wear their own face covering and be subjected to follow onsite safety procedures.

5. TRAVEL CONSIDERATIONS

- a) Only mission essential, time sensitive business travel should be considered. Any local requirements for quarantining upon return from travel should be followed.

If a Mission Area or Agency has employees who would prefer to return to their worksite during any of the phases, a manager can approve this request provided proper protocols, including those listed above, are followed. Managers should prioritize requests for employees whose ability to complete some or all of their work remotely is limited.

MOVING TO NORMAL OPERATIONS

1. **ELIGIBLE FOR RETURN TO THE FACILITY-** A facility may consider fully reopening to normal operations if:
 - a) The facility operates at Phase Three *for at least 14 consecutive days* with no new cases of COVID 19 onsite. In total, a facility must operate for at least 42 days in Phases 1, 2 and 3 before moving to normal operations with no new cases of COVID-19 onsite;
 - b) The capacity of local public transportation and status of public schools, day care, etc., have been assessed and accounted for in planning.
 - c) To move to the next phase, the facility coordinates with the Mission/Agency on the intention to move to the normal operations using the same process noted in [“Reopening Coordination.”](#)
2. **CONTRACTORS AND PARTNERS**
 - a) All Mission Areas/Agencies considering reopening and resuming onsite mission delivery must coordinate with Contract Officers and Contract Officer Representatives when requiring contractors to also resume performance onsite. Contractors must comply with the facility face covering, PPE, and cleaning protocols.
 - b) All Mission Areas/Agencies considering reopening and resume onsite mission delivery who co-locate or co-perform mission functions with strategic partners, cooperators, or grantees must coordinate with the Agency’s responsible Program Manager. Partners, cooperators, and visitors must comply with Agency safety procedures.

REDUCING PHASES OF OPERATIONS

A facility may need to consider returning to a previous phase for a host of reasons.

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1. The facility has an increase in its positive COVID-19 cases in its onsite workforce requiring closure of the entire building or significant portions for deep cleaning work force onsite;
2. Appropriate Mitigation Practices cannot be effectively being maintained onsite or appropriate PPE is no longer available for employees and contractors.
3. Mission Areas and Agencies must update the facility status on the [Reopening Tracker](#).

ACCELERATING PHASES OF OPERATIONS

Mission Areas and Agency Heads may accelerate, or bypass one or more phases of operations outlined above to ensure the continuation of mission critical activities. The request to accelerate or bypass one or more operational phases must be submitted by the Undersecretary or Mission Area Chief of Staff to the Deputy Secretary prior to implementation.

AGENCY & MISSION AREA LEVEL DECISION PROCESS

Mission Areas and Agency Heads, or Chiefs of Staff (or their designees) are responsible for analyzing and assessing the factors above. Decisions must be based on mission needs and should be documented, defensible, and focused on legitimate non-discriminatory reasons. Mission Areas and Agency Heads (or their designees) are delegated the ability to reopen a facility. However, all proposed reopening decisions must be reported at least two business days in advance of the reopening date.

1. Mission Areas and Agency Heads (or their designee) submit the status change in the SharePoint Facilities Reopening Tracker, located [here](#) (this link is for the USDA-wide tracker; please coordinate within your Mission Area for access).
2. The facility statuses can be viewed on [this dashboard](#), which will help decision makers and managers understand USDA's posture across the country.
3. Facilities should also think through the list of concerns before moving from a phase to the next.
 - a) The onsite mission being achieved including whether maximum telework has reduced the ability of the Agency to provide service to customers and constituents or protect federal property.
 - b) Proposed actions for ensuring onsite operation will mitigate risk of exposure to employees, contractors and the public onsite (see "[Mitigation Actions](#)" above) including availability of face coverings, PPE, and cleaning supplies and ability to social distance. This should also include ability to clean fleet for functions that require vehicle use.
 - c) Whether applicable labor agreements have been reviewed to assess bargaining obligations and whether bargaining has occurred.
 - d) Hyperlink to or additional information from the facility's state or local public health department including specific guidance to the community (only required if gating criteria has not been met).
 - e) Type of communication required.
 - f) Any other information relevant to making the recommendation (e.g., number of coronavirus cases in your area, local health declarations, Mission/Agency level recommendations, etc.)

PREDECISIONAL, DELIBERATIVE

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TRACKING COVID-19 POSITIVE CASES

USDA maintains an anonymized list of employees who have tested positive for COVID-19. This list is used by senior leadership to understand COVID-19's impact on employees across the country and assist with facility status changes. Because this list is used to assess the overall impact of COVID-19 on USDA's workforce, test-positives should be reported for employees that have returned to their duty station. Employees who have not returned to their duty station in accordance with USDA guidance may choose to voluntarily disclose their COVID-19 status to their manager. Contractors who test positive should be reported if the contractor was onsite within 14 days of contracting COVID-19. Employees, contractors, and visitors should follow CDC guidance when they are in close contact with a test positive.

Access to this list is limited to 3-5 pandemic points of contact per Mission Area. No personally identifiable information (PII) is collected.

USDA follows [CDC guidance](#) when an employee tests positive. Facility or Mission Area pandemic coordinators should conduct the proper contact tracing using [this questionnaire](#). Please refer to CDC's latest guidance to assess whether additional cleaning is recommended.

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ATTACHMENT A- VISITOR HEALTH AND TRAVEL QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Have you, someone living in your household, someone with you have been in close or frequent contact with, or someone you are caring for been diagnosed with COVID-19 (Coronavirus) or had any contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19?

2. Do you currently have, or have you had within the last 24 hours, any cold or flu symptoms, including a fever greater than 100.4, shortness of breath, body aches or muscle pain, coughing, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell, or nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea?
 - If the visitor answers “Yes” to any of these questions, the visitor will be denied entry to the USDA facility. The Security Officer will contact the USDA point of contact to notify them of the visitor’s status.

 - If the visitor answers “No” to all questions, the visitor will be allowed to enter the facility under normal procedures.

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ATTACHMENT B - EXAMPLES OF FACILITY SIGNAGE



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ATTACHMENT C- EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS GUIDANCE

Media requests for interviews:

- If your agency receives a request for interview from any media outlet on COVID-19, please forward those to press@usda.gov for approval before committing.

Template news releases:

- When a new template news release is developed, it will go through the full review process.
- When an approved template release is updated for a new state/facility, it will not need to go through the full review process; instead, send an updated version to press@usda.gov and dirk.fillpot@usda.gov. When submitting a revised template, please advise on which changes were made to previous versions. In most cases, you will promptly receive a response from OC indicating it is approved and we will coordinate with your agency on distribution date/time.

Media inquiries from major news media outlets or controversial inquiries:

- If your agency receives inquiries from major media outlets or reporters reach out with novel controversial inquiries, please forward those to press@usda.gov and dirk.fillpot@usda.gov.

Media inquiries from local media:

- If your agency receives inquiries about topics your agency already has cleared responses for that overall topic (whether in previously cleared Q&As or previous media responses), please email press@usda.gov and dirk.fillpot@usda.gov with the proposed response and note that it uses previously cleared language. If you don't hear back from OC before 2 hours, you can distribute the response to the media outlet.

Novel responses to media inquiries:

- Inquiries requiring new responses will go through the full review process.

Stakeholder announcements:

- Please email stakeholder communications to jacqueline.susmann@usda.gov and CC press@usda.gov

Social media clearances:

- Please email draft social media postings to thanhthanh.pham@usda.gov and CC oc-web@usda.gov and press@usda.gov

Website updates:

- If you have new COVID-19-related websites or webpages you need cleared, please send proposed text to peter.rhee@usda.gov and CC oc-web@usda.gov and press@usda.gov.

For internal communications, Mission Areas/Agencies will maintain the established COVID-19 clearance process.