



CORONAVIRUS COVID 19

INFORMATION, ADVICE AND SUPPORT FROM THE FARMER NETWORK LTD

Friday 20th March 2020

This briefing attempts to provide a summary of information relevant to farmers in our area and we will update this with the latest information as received. It is important to follow the latest Government advice in protecting yourself and your family - see [Gov response to COVID 19](#).

Apart from your health, we know from talking to farmers that you are very concerned about the impact of illness on your ability to run your business and look after your livestock. We would like your views on how the Farmer Network might help – ideas so far include how labour might be sourced for farms should they be hit by the virus and how to get supplies to farms and individuals that are self-isolating. We are planning to set a Covid 19 farm information page as a platform for farmers to communicate with us and to ask for help and offer support to others. We are also looking for funding to provide services to help you over the coming months.

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT AND GRANTS

Many Farmer Network members employ farm staff or have diversified businesses that will be negatively impacted by COVID-19. This week, the Chancellor set out a package of measures to support businesses including:

- A 12-month business rates holiday for all retail, hospitality and leisure businesses and grant funding of £25,000 where these businesses have a rateable value of between £15,000-£51,000. The business rate relief will apply to your next council tax bill in April 2020 and speak to your Local Authority for details of the grant.
- Small business grants of £10,000 for businesses in receipt of small business rate relief or rural rate relief. Funding will be available from early April and if you are eligible, you will be contacted by your Local Authority.
- A Business Interruption Loan Scheme offering loans of up to £5 million for SMEs. The full rules of the Scheme and the list of accredited lenders is available on the [British Business Bank website](#). This should be available from early next week and all the major banks will offer the Scheme once it has launched.
- HMRC tax “Time to Pay” Scheme agreed on a case by case basis - 0800 0159 559.
- Statutory Sick Pay relief package for SMEs. If you employ staff and they are off sick or have to self-isolate they will most likely be entitled to Statutory Sick Pay currently £94.25 per week. Employers will be able to reclaim SSP paid for sickness absence due to COVID-19.

Today, the chancellor is set to unveil an emergency package today to help workers whose jobs and wages could be hit by the coronavirus outbreak. We are still researching details on how businesses might apply and will circulate more details when received.

FARMERS ON LIST OF KEY WORKERS FOR SCHOOL PLACES

On 20th March, the Department for Education released its list of key workers critical in the Coronavirus response efforts. This includes those involved in “Food Production and Delivery” such as farmers, farm workers and vets.

Children of parents working in these professions should be able to continue to send their children to school, but only if it is not possible to keep them at home. An example would be where the only source of alternative childcare is from those who are advised to socially isolate such as grandparents over 70 and those with underlying health conditions. Contact your child’s School and Local Authority for more details.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO TO PROTECT YOUR BUSINESS?

- Plan-ahead as much as possible and make sure you have sufficient supplies of what your business will need over the next few months, but without unnecessary stockpiling.
- If you use an adviser for Basic Payment Scheme and Stewardship applications, talk to them now about how these forms can be completed given the need to minimise contact. If you do not already use your on-line Rural Payments Agency account, get help obtaining the necessary permissions. If field sizes have changed, submit an RLE1 form as soon as possible and apply for planning permission if required for Stewardship water capital grant applications.
- If you employ staff, there is advice for employers and employees on the ACAS website at: <https://www.acas.org.uk/coronavirus>
- Be aware of Scams eg messages claiming to be from HMRS offering a tax refund due to Covid 19 and unsolicited e mails offering the chance to confirm the number of cases in your area.

HOW MIGHT CORONAVIRUS AFFECT THE FARMER NETWORK?

The Farmer Network’s project staff and coordinators already work from home and our office staff will now also be working remotely as Newton Rigg will be closed from today. General enquiries, fuel buying, membership renewals etc. will continue as normal. Where possible, it would be helpful if you could now contact us via our landline, 01768 868615. It may not always be possible for us to deal with calls/messages on the office mobile immediately, although it will be checked several times each day.

We may have an issue in accessing our post on a regular basis as Royal Mail will not deliver while the Newton Rigg campus is closed. To help with this, where possible, if you are making a payment to the Network for an invoice or membership renewal it would be appreciated if this could be done by BACS or by card payment over the phone. If you need to send a cheque to us by post, please send an email to admin@thefarmernetwork.co.uk so we know to look out for it when normal service resumes and don’t send you reminders for things that have been paid. Similarly, if sending us invoices, training voucher evidence or any other paperwork that requires prompt attention, sending it electronically would be best.

We are entering a quieter time of year for events, and have currently cancelled all immediate meetings based on advice from Public Health England. We will be looking at ways that we can continue activity safely as it is unlikely to be possible to hold face to face meetings for some time.

As always at times of crisis, look out for your farming neighbours and help them as much as you can at what is already a stressful time of year.

We will keep you updated each week via our E News every Friday afternoon. It is very important that you provide us with an e mail address for your business and talk to our office if you are not receiving E News (also check your Junk folder).

**We will also post information and updates on our social media pages –
Facebook “@thecumbriafarmernetwork” and “@theyorkshirefarmernetwork”
Twitter “@farmernetwork1”.**