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Supply of PPE heading to NC farmers to help keep workers & food supply safe


by Rex Hodge
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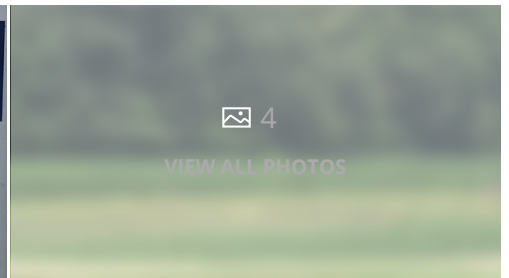


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Western North Carolina (WLOS) — North Carolina leaders want to prevent the spread of coronavirus among farmworkers. That's why farmers will soon be receiving a large amount of personal protection equipment to help keep them and our food supply safe.

WLOS

The state health department is distributing 900,000 pieces of personal protective equipment like masks out to farmers to be distributed through extension agent offices.

Terry Kelley, head of Henderson County's extension office, says in this pandemic, farmers are essential.



"We've got a lot of seasonal workers," he says. "They come in just for the harvest season."

Kelley applauds the initial delivery of PPE that was distributed to farmers in 31 counties, Henderson County among them.

"We're going to be getting surgical masks, re-usable masks and hand sanitizer," he says. "These are things that they can use on packing lines. They can use in their direct market areas."

While COVID-19 clusters have popped up at some farms in the western part of the state, Kelley says Henderson County hasn't experienced any. He is aware of earlier outbreaks shutting down meatpacking operations in the Midwest.

LIVE

70°

69°

72°

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Farm in Western North Carolina (Photo credit: WLOS)

"Our growers can't afford for that to happen from an economic standpoint. They have to make a living. But we can't afford for it to happen because we need the food as well."

Kelley says stocking farmworkers with PPE will help avoid empty grocery store shelves.

"We don't want that to happen again. We want people to know they can get a safe food supply any time they need it."

Kelley says Henderson County has already received packages of masks, shields, and sanitizer, from emergency management, even the National Guard. But he says with the coronavirus continuing, farmworkers will need more.

"They live a lot of times in close quarters and they need to be able to keep those places disinfected," he says. "To keep them safe, to keep their customers safe, we feel like it's important to give them some protective equipment to help them out. We've got to protect these folks and protect our food supply. We all got to eat."

The deliveries are not only going to the farmers themselves as they work, but they'll be able to take some of those materials home as well to protect their families.