



MADISON COUNTY DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

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Madison County Health Department Does Walkthrough of Green Empire Farms

Wampsville, NY - Madison County Health Department (MCDOH) yesterday once again did a walkthrough of the Green Empire Farms in Oneida, NY. After two days of large scale targeted testing it was found that 87 of their employees tested positive for COVID-19. Many of the employees that tested positive reside in local hotels.

Health Department staff after conducting a thorough investigation of the site found that Green Empire Farms does indeed have many protocols in place to limit the possible spread of COVID-19. Some of those include employees taking their temperatures when they arrive to work their shift, hand sanitizer and boot sanitization stations at the entrance, spaced out working stations, limits to numbers of people on breaks and signs in the break rooms to limit how many people can be at a table at a time. These are just a few of the protocols put into place. The MCDOH is satisfied with the conditions at the greenhouse.

MCDOH would like to also address the living conditions of the majority of the greenhouse workers. Prior to March 22, 2020 the Health Department was not aware that migrant workers were living in hotels in the area. They had been working with Green Empire Farms to permit and inspect onsite living facilities that are still not finished. At no time was a permit requested or was one issued for migrant farmworker housing at either hotel in Madison County.

The Health Department was aware at the end of March that some contractors were living in the local hotels that worked in various capacities at the greenhouses. The MCDOH is responsible for permitting hotels, and in that capacity these hotels met those requirements. We were not of the understanding then that they were being used as migrant farmworker housing. Because we permit hotels, we had initial conversations with hotel staff about proper cleaning protocols of common areas and social distancing. The focus at the MCDOH was understanding COVID-19, educating the public about the virus, and working with those who tested positive for the virus.

The Health Department became more aware of the living conditions when positive cases started to arise on April 30, 2020. The priority then was to find out how far the virus had spread. We wanted to ensure we were getting everyone who needed it, the proper health care. Proper cleaning instructions were given to the hotel staff, cleaning supplies were given to those living in the rooms so that cleaning staff does not have to enter COVID-19 positive rooms, and we have ensured that individuals are fed.



The MCDOH has contacted the New York State Department of Health for guidance regarding migrant farmworker housing compared to hotel patrons, since what we initially knew was that a variety of types of contractors were at the hotels. Once we have that information we will conduct an investigation to ensure the workers are in living conditions that adhere to New York State Migrant Farmworker Housing regulations and issue citations as needed.

“We want the public and the workers to know that we are doing everything we can to protect and enhance the health of the community,” said Public Health Director Eric Faisst. “Our community has been met by many hurdles we have never faced before. We will continue to grow and work hard get us all through to the end of this health crisis.”

For more information, please visit <https://www.madisoncounty.ny.gov/2479/Coronavirus-COVID-19> or call the Madison County non-medical COVID-19 Hotline at 315-366-2770.

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