COVID-19 Guidance to Ranchers

With shearing and branding underway and artificial insemination (A.I.ing) soon to follow, the Montana Department of Ag has provided guidelines to help keep the ranching community safe by limiting exposure to and the spread of COVID-19 according to Powder River Extension Agent Mary Rumph.

The Department of agriculture, and the protection of our food supply, has been declared critical infrastructure by the Department of Homeland Security during the COVID-19 response. This declaration means that we have a responsibility to maintain continuity within our agricultural industry.

The State of Montana, the Department of Livestock and Extension recognizes the importance of business continuity for farmers and ranchers. We also understand that ranching activities such as branding, artificial insemination, and shearing may require involvement of multiple individuals. The mentioned group activities do not always permit individuals to maintain the recommended physical separation of 6 feet. While they continue to encourage local governments to permit continuation of ranching activities, we ask that farmers and ranchers strongly consider implementation of the following guidelines set forth by MT Department of Public Health:

- Individuals at risk for severe complications of COVID-19, such as those with diabetes, heart disease, lung disease, and those who are immunosuppressed should avoid performing ranch activities within a group.
- Limit brandings and other activities to essential crews only (smallest crew possible to get the job done).
• Do not provide a group meal. Offer sack lunches or have the crew pack their own lunch.
• Do not share water bottles or utensils.
• Have water and soap available for handwashing on site. Hand sanitizer is not effective if hands are soiled (dirt, manure, blood, etc.).
• When taking breaks, maintain six feet of distance between individuals while socializing.
• When branding, consider the use of branding forks to restrain animals when using a rope/drag method. When a calf table is used, identify the smallest number of people needed to operate the equipment you have.
• Keep the number of people near the animal at one time to a minimum, such as having the person vaccinating wait for the person performing castration to step away.

Please note, local public health officers have the authority to require more restrictive measures than those described above. Please be aware of regulations specific to our county.

We appreciate the role that livestock producers serve in our state’s agriculture industry but acknowledge that we all have a role in limiting the spread of COVID-19. If you have any questions regarding the above guidance, please contact the Department of Livestock at (406) 444-2976.