***“If you got time to lean, you got to clean”***

*Unknown*

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One of the early standards that McDonald’s restaurants held religiously was cleanliness. I never had the pleasure of working at one of these fine eating establishments but I had family members and friends who did. Employees were told to always look busy when on the clock and if there was “time to lean” it should be spent keeping everything sparkling and clean, all while maintaining a smile. Behind the counters were spray bottles with a pink cleaning agent that gave the restaurants, anywhere in the U.S., a consistent smell of “clean”. Even their restrooms had inspection logs posted, at least in the men’s room, that identified the last employee who had inspected it for cleanliness. Wherever you travelled, you could almost always rely on McDonald’s franchises having a clean restroom. This business model was so successful that millions of American moms put up with the limited food selection to have access to clean restrooms for their children.

Farm employers could learn a little something from McDonald’s business practices, especially when everyone is working at trying to contain the spread of COVID-19. Having a clean restroom available, including access to toilet paper, soap, water, and hand towels, should no longer be seen as a workplace privilege or a special form of compensation hung over the employee’s heads like a Christmas bonus. The cost of providing and maintaining employee restrooms should considered a cost of doing business just like seeds, fertilizer, and diesel fuel.

The concept of restroom access for farm employees is not new. Under the Field Sanitation Standards contained in OSHA CFR 1910.14, farm employers have been required to provide field workers access to restrooms for over 30 years. These standards were implemented to ensure that workers do not suffer adverse health effects that can result if restrooms are not sanitary and/or available when needed. When first implemented, the push back from large fruit and vegetable growers, and some farm organizations, was substantial. Arguments were posed that a big farm in Montana would need hundreds of portable toilets to comply with the law. Some growers mounted portable toilets on trailers and towed them from field-to-field for scheduled use assuming that restroom needs were regulated by the time-of-day, not the unpredictable nature of normal body functions.

In a focus group I once participated in with a group of seasonal farm workers, one of the participants encouraged me “not to eat the lettuce” when there was conflict between the growers and farm workers. It was during these times that the portable field toilets didn’t show up, or were not kept clean and maintained. In some strange form of reasoning, having access to a restroom was seen as a bargaining chip.

Having access to a clean, well-ventilated restroom, well-stocked with toilet paper, soap, water, and a means of drying your hands is not only a “moral” obligation of farm employers, but should also be a critical component of the farm’s safe food handling and biosecurity practices. Past cases of food poisoning caused by contaminated fruits and vegetables due to a lack of hand washing facilities has cost agricultural producers millions of dollars in lost produce and civil liability.

Not every farmer needs restroom facilities that would pass the “mom-test” but if the farm employs outside labor, or is open to visitors, having access to a clean, well maintained restroom should not be seen as an “employee perk”, but as a means of keeping everyone safe and healthy, including the end consumer.

Another issue regarding restrooms is their accessibility to everyone who is expected to be onsite. If the farm is involved in any form of “agritourism”, or employs persons with disabilities, the restrooms should meet current ADA standards. Even portable toilets are available in accessible designs.

Good sources of information on the standards that apply to employee and business restroom facilities include your local County Health Department., or downloading [OSHA Fact Sheet #51: “Field Sanitation Standards under the Occupational Safety and Health Act.”](https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WHD/legacy/files/whdfs51.pdf)