**Guidelines for Field Scouting, Site Visits,**

**Result/Demonstration Work, and Walk-ins**

**Situation:** This guideline has been developed to address the following general items.

* Many IPM Agents have contracted fields to be regularly scouted for pests and agronomic development.
* Specialists, Program Specialists and County Agents are often asked to visit particular fields to ascertain problems encountered by the clientele.
* County Agents and other Extension personnel are often asked to make site visits to diagnose stakeholder problems and collect specimens for diagnostic testing.
* Extension personnel, including student workers, are involved in working fields for test plots and other result/demonstrations.
* Stakeholders will sometimes bring samples for inspection to the county offices and Extension/Research Centers.

**Travel restrictions:** County based personnel are not supposed to travel on official business outside of the county/counties for which they are responsible. Extension Specialists and Program Specialists should avoid travel beyond the geographical area for which they are responsible. **All site visit travel, regardless of distance must be approved through the identified approval process.** Given the dynamic nature of the COVID-19 situation, be sure to consult the latest guidance on travel restrictions.

**Travel Approval:**

**If these activities can be delayed they should be delayed as long as possible. However, we know that some of these activities are deemed mission critical and time sensitive.**

**Regularly scheduled field scouting:** If you have fields that you regularly scout, submit a scouting plan that describes where you go, and the dates those sites will be visited. Reporting date ranges of a few days is acceptable. These plans should be submitted to the District Extension Administrator, IPM Coordinator and/or associate department head who will forward these to the Director’s Office.

**Irregular site visits:** If you are requested to visit a field to ascertain a problem, gather information from the client to determine the risk associated with the issue. Determine the date (or range of a few dates) the visit will occur and submit a request to conduct the visit with your immediate supervisor. The supervisor will determine necessity of the site visit and if critical will forward to the Director’s Office for approval.

**Applied research activities:** We understand that preplanned experimental designs (including but not limited to planting, maintenance of plots) are time critical activities. Develop a plan that describes where you go, and the dates of the activities and personnel involved in that activity (minimize number of personnel to essential only). The plan should include travel by individuals in separate vehicles to maintain social distancing. Reporting date ranges of a few days is acceptable. These plans should be submitted to the immediate supervisor (DEA and/or ADH) who will forward these to the Director’s Office for approval if they concur that the activities are critical.

**Laboratory sample assessment:** Often samples must be processed in the laboratory to determine the causative agent involved. When acquiring the samples in person, follow the procedure outlined in irregular site visits. For submission of specimen, please contact the appropriate Plant Disease Diagnostic Lab. At current time, the TX Plant Diagnostic Labs does not accept walk-in samples. Samples should be mailed or a courier service utilized – Next day service is highly encouraged to maintain the integrity of the sample. TX Plant Diagnostic Labs: TPDDL-College Station (http://plantclinic.tamu.edu) 979-845-8032 or TX High Plain Plant Disease Diagnostic Lab (https://thppdd-lab.tamu.edu) [Specializes in Small Grains and Row Crops]. Samples should be accompanied with the appropriate submission forms.

**Best Practices when conducting scouting/site visits/applied research activities:** Avoid contact with other people. Do not take others along with you unless absolutely necessary. If someone must join you at a site do not travel in the same vehicle, do not have a meal together and maintain social distancing at all times (6 feet or more). Avoid face-to-face interaction with the client when possible. Ideally, scout the field or site alone and provide information to the client via phone, text, email, or other non-face-to-face venue. If the situation requires face-to-face interaction with the client, practice good social distancing. While travelling to the site location avoid interacting with groups of people (i.e. when stopping for fuel or food, etc.). If it is necessary for more than one individual to be present to establish, monitor, or harvest a plot, please obtain clearance through each of the individuals’ direct supervisors prior to the activity.

**County Extension and Research/Extension Center Walk-ins:** Encourage stakeholders to send photos and to use the diagnostic services already provided by Texas A&M AgriLife. Growers/farmers/homeowners should be notified (via door signage or text on county websites) about sample drop-off procedures during this time. They should call before dropping at the specified location. Then the extension personnel can pick these up using the non-pharmaceutical interventions specified by CDC, and without face-to-face contact (<https://www.cdc.gov/nonpharmaceutical-interventions/index.html>).