



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Stemilt Ag Services shares COVID-19 test results from isolated East Wenatchee site

WENATCHEE, Wash. – Stemilt Ag Services (SAS) received COVID-19 results late yesterday after coordinating with Confluence Health to proactively test 71 asymptomatic team members at an isolated East Wenatchee site over the weekend. Thirty-six individuals tested positive for COVID-19. The group is in isolation, and SAS continues to follow Chelan-Douglas County Health District protocols for confirmed cases. This was the first widescale testing done in Chelan and Douglas County on asymptomatic agriculture workers.

“Our essential business of growing fruit to feed people would not be possible without our frontline team members,” said West Mathison, Stemilt president. “We are doing all that we can to ensure our team members are well-cared for while in isolation.”

Dr. Joel Banken, who oversees the Confluence Health operated Stemilt Family Clinic in Wenatchee visited with the SAS team members at the isolation site on Tuesday. He provided them with clinic information and pamphlets on the virus.

“Everyone was in good spirits,” said Banken. “It’s great that this family medicine clinic exists and will continue to be available to serve employees.”

Stemilt has proactively followed Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations for spacing, hygiene, and social distancing in its work processes.

Local public health officials and health care organizations are fully involved with these positive cases, and able to support individuals if needed. Stemilt, in collaboration with Confluence Health, will monitor each team member daily and is working on a protocol to re-test the individuals who tested negative this week while they quarantine.

“Stemilt has actively implemented social distancing, symptom monitoring and other recommended COVID control measures at its work and housing sites,” said Barry Kling, administrator at Chelan-Douglas Health District. “What these test results tell us is that asymptomatic

cases of COVID-19 are so common that these measures are not sufficient in these settings even when implemented well. That means we need to think differently. Social distancing measures should be maintained at farmworker sites and housing, but we also need to greatly increase testing of workers so that isolation and quarantine can be used when needed, and uninfected workers can continue to work. We must assure that agriculture workers who are sick get the care they need. Public Health will be working with the ag industry to make this happen. We are fortunate that local health care organizations such as Confluence and Columbia Valley Community Health are also ready to play an important part in this effort to protect workers -- and to protect a truly essential local industry."

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