

GapVax was on track to have a record year when COVID hit. We had sold out of production slots on our 2020 schedule. In the beginning it was “two weeks to slow the spread” but constant reporting of high infection rates, deaths, mandates that were unheard of – it was hard to know how to plan or what to think.

Fortunately, we were deemed “essential” but we knew we have to keep our employees safe. When schools and businesses began to shutdown, we decided to close for one week to get a plan together. A week paid to allow our employees time to make the necessary adjustments for their family’s new situations, while allowing GapVax to make the necessary accommodations to keep our workforce safe while staying open to keep manufacturing essential equipment.

Our customer base is the “essential” worker. GapVax manufactures trucks to maintain the sewer systems, which were now being inundated with issues. We had to continue getting product to the customer.

The GapVax plan was to have anyone that could work from home, work remotely until things settled down. Our primary work force is in the shop, so we could not be without them for long. GapVax implemented the mask mandates and social distancing, spaced workstations accordingly and started a second shift to keep up with the production schedule.

The most difficult thing was following the ever-changing guidelines put forth by the CDC and government. The businesses deemed “non-essential” to some are essential to others.

The unemployment benefits and constantly changing COVID advice made it tough to get some employees back to work. We had to make the decision ourselves to get back in the office and shop at some point, so we did that by mid-summer. Most came back to work while some chose not to.

Our team projected material needs and we ordered as much as we could to keep production uninterrupted. We are now seeing the effects of those businesses, our suppliers, who were once deemed non-essential being unable to keep up with demand for their products.

Another challenge we are facing is hiring workers. With stimulus checks and unemployment funds out there, it is harder to fill positions.

GapVax was born from a community struggle, a devastating event. The pandemic was no different. We’ve built our foundation on a workforce driven to overcome adversity.

Our struggle becomes recovering from the other manufacturers that were hard hit, unable to be open to supply us and other “essential” businesses. Deeming some businesses “non-essential” because they manufacture one simple part, has a far reach and we are feeling that.