



March 25, 2020

Director Gary McDowell
Director, Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development
P.O. Box 30017
Lansing, Michigan 48909

Subject: Garden Centers are Essential

Dear Gary,

As our nation, communities and businesses react to the spread of COVID-19, the Michigan Greenhouse Growers Council commends the efforts of local, state and federal governments to mitigate the impact and strive to keep the public safe and healthy.

The discussion of how to best ensure the public health has included the possibility of asking "non-essential" retail operations to shut their doors for a period, with the intent of minimizing exposure to the virus.

The Michigan Greenhouse Growers Council is fully in support of sensible steps public health officials may deem necessary to combat COVID-19. At the same, we urge public officials at all levels of government to consider garden retailers among those retail operations determined to be "essential" and allow these business owners the option to stay open as a public service.

The Michigan Greenhouse Growers Council respectfully asks you to reconsider Michigan's decision that garden centers are not considered essential. Other states around us such as Ohio and Illinois have made the decision that garden centers are essential and have allowed them to stay at least partially open. In New York state, one of the hardest hit in this crisis, they specifically spell out care and sales of plants as essential:

Horticultural Operations: For purposes of Executive Order 202.6/PAUSE Executive Order, "Essential Business" states "agriculture/farms," which includes the horticulture industry. As outlined in Agriculture and Markets Law Article 25-AA Section 301, horticulture is a key component of agriculture and New York State farms.

For horticultural operations, the Department defines the following businesses/activities as consistent with Executive Order 202.6:

- *Production, movement, maintenance, and sale of vegetable plants, nursery stock, trees, plants, and flowers at greenhouse and nursery operations.*
- *Tree and shrub trimming and removal for disease, safety, and public health purposes.*
- *The placement and ground maintenance of sod, landscaping plants, flowers, ornamentals, and trees on residential and commercial grounds.*
- *Transportation necessary to meet any of the above functions.*

<https://agriculture.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2020/03/guidanceforthehorticultureindustry.pdf>

North Carolina also considers garden centers essential:

Agriculture workers supporting the green industry to include nursery operations, garden centers, landscape and maintenance companies critical to the environmental and physical living conditions necessary in our communities

<http://www.ncagr.gov/disaster/documents/COVID-19.htm>

Consumer horticulture contributes \$346 billion to the U.S. economy and creates more than 2 million jobs. But the story doesn't end there. Horticulture benefits the health and happiness of every citizen and every community in the U.S.

Americans are resilient and resourceful in the face of adversity provided the opportunity to produce their own food and manage any shortage in the supply chain. Millions of Americans engage in food production at home, and more are sure to follow as the COVID-19 crisis unfolds.

With thousands of garden retailers serving communities across North America, these stores provide much-needed services. Whether helping Americans produce home-grown fruits and vegetables, as Americans did during WWII as Victory Gardens, as a mental and physical health relief or providing wholesome activities for children, garden centers offer products and support that individuals and communities can utilize during these stressful times.

Many of the products carried by garden retailers are agricultural, like seeds and edible plants. Others are necessary tools and supplies. Together they are essential to maintaining a healthy living environment. In many communities, the garden retailer may be the only outlet where consumers have access to essential supplies for growing, gardening, maintaining or repairing their residences.

It is also important to note that many garden retailers have been cornerstones in their communities for decades, providing essential supplies in past emergency situations, such as tornados, floods and fires.

Because of these considerations, the Michigan Greenhouse Growers Council urges the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to consider garden retailers among those operations determined to be “essential” retail outlets that can exercise the option to remain open to support their communities during these trying times.

Then Michigan Greenhouse Growers Council also urges all business owners to look to guidelines of the CDC and state and local health authorities and to use the utmost care and caution when considering how to proceed with operations. Some commonsense guidelines offered by the Ohio Nursery and Landscaping Association are:

Garden Centers:

If you choose to continue to provide these garden center services, please follow these BMP's (Best Management Practices) along with any other procedures you have put in place:

- **Consider offering online shopping, call ahead orders, curbside pickup or delivery as available**
- Limit the number of customers near the cash registers and in the store at any given time. Many retailers are marking the floor in check-out lines to encourage social distancing.
- Sanitize all carts, baskets, door handles throughout the day as well as the credit card pads and door handles.
- Staff members will be required to sanitize regularly
- Have hand sanitizer available at the checkout.
- Social distancing between staff and customers is required in the store, grounds and greenhouses
- We respectfully ask any individual exhibiting even minor symptoms to stay home.
- Permit phone orders

Sincerely,



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