

April 1, 2020

Dear Governors:

We are grateful for your leadership in protecting public health during the COVID-19 pandemic. We understand that state and local movement restrictions are necessary for limiting the spread of this virus. At the same time, we know you understand that the need to produce, transport, and distribute food and to protect public health and infrastructure are equally essential. On behalf of the production agriculture and agribusiness groups we represent, we look forward to working with you to ensure we meet both objectives with the best interests of public health in mind.

As new travel and work restrictions are put in place, there are several actions that we ask you to consider, to aid the continued movement of food and agricultural inputs and related services.

1. Adopt the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) recently revised definition of "critical infrastructure" that includes food, agriculture, and public health businesses and supporting services. We understand that states may need to be more expansive when defining critical businesses, but we ask that you not be more restrictive than the new DHS guidelines. Equally important, we ask that you deploy these policies statewide to ensure local governments and law enforcement allow for the operation and movement of food and the supplies needed to produce our food and protect public health. The National Governors Association has published a similar recommendation. Finally, assisting businesses deemed critical in developing appropriate credentials that allow for movement across county and/or state borders is going to be important as additional movement restrictions are put in place.
2. Maintain and expand our transportation capacity. We are grateful for steps that have already been taken to ensure truck drivers can log longer hours of service during this crisis. We encourage states to provide flexibility on current load-limit restrictions, as well, in a manner that expands trucking capacity while continuing to balance the critical need for public safety. This flexibility has been important for medical supplies and should be expanded to agricultural inputs as well to assure timely delivery of these products. Similarly, the need to extend current CDL licenses and/or provide for all needed testing of new drivers and their ability to obtain the necessary CDL endorsements is essential to ensuring that we maintain a safe and healthy transportation workforce. Finally, services to support our trucking industry, including public rest areas and other vital services, must remain open to transportation workers who rely upon these facilities.
3. Ensure needed state testing and certification laboratories and facilities remain operational to the greatest extent possible. Maintaining the safety of the food that we produce, and the inputs required by farmers and other applicators, is essential during this time. Many testing and certification laboratories are located on university campuses. As these universities evaluate essential business operations that will maintain open, we would ask that these laboratories be kept operational as part of our critical infrastructure.

We are committed to working closely with you as you work to limit the spread of this virus and provide for the safety, nourishment, and well-being of your citizens. We appreciate your leadership in ensuring that new policies or movement restrictions recognize food production, distribution, and the maintenance of our infrastructure are critical priorities.

Sincerely,

American Farm Bureau Federation
American Feed Industry Association
American Mushroom Institute
American Seed Trade Association
American Soybean Association
Agricultural Retailers Association
American Seed Trade Association
American Sugar Alliance
Biotechnology Innovation Organization
California Specialty Crops Council
Council of Producers & Distributors of Agrotechnology
CropLife America
The Fertilizer Institute
Hop Growers of America
National Agricultural Aviation Association
National Alliance of Independent Crop Consultants
National Association of Wheat Growers
National Cattlemen's Beef Association
National Chicken Council
National Corn Growers Association
National Cotton Council
National Farmers Union
National Milk Producers Federation
National Onion Association
National Pest Management Association
National Potato Council
National Sorghum Producers
Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE)
Southern Crop Production Association
United Fresh Produce Association
US Apple Association
US Durum Growers Association
USA Rice Federation
Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine
Wine Institute