



**STATE OF MISSISSIPPI
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND COMMERCE**

ANDY GIPSON
COMMISSIONER

March 20, 2020

Honorable Tate Reeves
Governor of Mississippi
Post Office Box 139
Jackson, Mississippi 39205

RE: Critical Agriculture and Food Supply Infrastructure

I write this letter in support of the industries that are not only vital to the agriculture industry every day but are especially critical to the industry and consumers during emergency conditions such as the 2020 novel coronavirus outbreak.

The Office of the Governor has broad power during a state of emergency. As you consider your next steps regarding emergency response and potential restrictions on business operations, I respectfully request that the following agricultural industries be recognized as essential, providing services that are indispensable in the effort to protect public health, basic needs, and our state's and nation's food supply. Similarly, local governments are making decisions to close or restrict business operations in their jurisdictions. I respect their commitment to local public health issues, but I believe it is imperative that local government does not interrupt the businesses listed below which are critical to the food supply chain of our entire state, region and country. I respectfully request you consider local pre-emption language in any executive order or emergency response directives to ensure these essential businesses continue operation.

- Grocery stores, farmers' markets which are certified or which match the operation requirements for certification, farm and produce stands, supermarkets, food banks, convenience stores, and other establishments engaged in the retail sale of canned food, dry goods, fresh fruits and vegetables, pet supply, fresh meats, fish and poultry, and any other household consumer products (such as cleaning and personal care products);
- Food manufacturers and food processors, rendering facilities and transporters, meat processing facilities, feed processing facilities;
- Food cultivation, including farming, livestock, aquaculture, horticulture, and fishing;
- Public livestock auctions, livestock feedlots, dealers and brokers of livestock and feed, livestock and agricultural transporters, feed stores, agricultural retail providers, veterinarian services,
- Businesses that provide food, shelter, and social services, and other necessities of life for economically disadvantaged or otherwise needy individuals;
- Gas stations and petroleum producers, suppliers, distributors;
- Exterminators and other service providers who provide services that are necessary to maintaining the safety, sanitation, and essential operation of residences, essential activities, and essential businesses.
- Businesses engaged in installing or repairing weighting and measuring equipment, businesses engaged in the manufacturing or repairing or retail sales of agricultural equipment;
- Timber farms, transporters and processors;

- And any agricultural production which includes but is not limited to the art and science of cultivating the soil, plants, trees and livestock to produce food, fiber and shelter and the management of our natural resources and forests, as well as the production, processing, packaging and marketing of agricultural products.

Additionally, the "Memorandum on Identification of Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers During COVID-19 Response" dated March 19, 2020 by Christopher C. Krebs, Director of Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security advises the following food and agriculture roles be considered as essential critical infrastructure workforce:

- Workers supporting groceries, pharmacies and other retail that sells food and beverage products
- Restaurant carry-out and quick serve food operations - Carry-out and delivery food employees
- Food manufacturer employees and their supplier employees—to include those employed in food processing (packers, meat processing, cheese plants, milk plants, produce, etc.) facilities; livestock, poultry, seafood slaughter facilities; pet and animal feed processing facilities; human food facilities producing by-products for animal food; beverage production facilities; and the production of food packaging
- Farm workers to include those employed in animal food, feed, and ingredient production, packaging, and distribution; manufacturing, packaging, and distribution of veterinary drugs; truck delivery and transport; farm and fishery labor needed to produce our food supply domestically
- Farm workers and support service workers to include those who field crops; commodity inspection; fuel ethanol facilities; storage facilities; and other agricultural inputs
- Employees and firms supporting food, feed, and beverage distribution, including warehouse workers, vendor managed inventory controllers and blockchain managers
- Workers supporting the sanitation of all food manufacturing processes and operations from wholesale to retail
- Company cafeterias - in-plant cafeterias used to feed employees
- Workers in food testing labs in private industries and in institutions of higher education
- Workers essential for assistance programs and government payments
- Employees of companies engaged in the production of chemicals, medicines, vaccines, and other substances used by the food and agriculture industry, including pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, minerals, enrichments, and other agricultural production aids
- Animal agriculture workers to include those employed in veterinary health; manufacturing and distribution of animal medical materials, animal vaccines, animal drugs, feed ingredients, feed, and bedding, etc.; transportation of live animals, animal medical materials; transportation of deceased animals for disposal; raising of animals for food; animal production operations; slaughter and packing plants and associated regulatory and government workforce
- Workers who support the manufacture and distribution of forest products, including, but not limited to timber, paper, and other wood products
- Employees engaged in the manufacture and maintenance of equipment and other infrastructure necessary to agricultural production and distribution

If a private business in agriculture makes the decision to cease operations during this time of emergency, it is not my intent to prevent any citizen from making such a free market choice. However, I believe these agricultural and commerce related industries described above should be allowed to continue operation as part of our state's commitment to the health and public safety of our citizens.

I appreciate your consideration of these essential businesses and the services they provide for all Mississippians. Please let me know if I can answer any questions.



Andy Gipson
Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce