

March 23, 2020

Attn: Elected Officials in Georgia
Subject: Georgia's Green Industry is Essential

Dear Elected Officials in Georgia,

The Georgia Green Industry Association would like to applaud the efforts of our state and local leaders to protect the public and diminish the economic impact on the agricultural industry as we all navigate the uncertainties brought about by COVID-19.

There has been much ongoing conversation on how to reduce the spread of the virus effectively; meanwhile, the preventative measure of closing non-essential businesses is causing significant concern in our industry. While we fully support prudent decisions to help prevent the spread of the virus, we would ask that our elected public officials include our green industry businesses among the essential companies that were allowed to remain open as a service to the public. These include nursery producers, garden centers, and landscape and irrigation professionals that install and maintain commercial and residential properties, and all industry companies in the direct supply chain for these businesses.

Our industry's economic impact is quite substantial. However, we would also urge you to consider the direct services and indirect health benefits provided through green industry businesses that make them essential to our communities, especially during this time of social distancing.

It is important to note that horticulture impacts the health and happiness of every single Georgian. During this uncertain and stressful season, many Georgians will turn to their gardens for food, beauty, and some much-needed relief from the worries associated with this pandemic. We all need to have access to the plants, seeds, and related garden items sold at our garden centers, or to have the ability to hire a landscape professional to help us maintain our property. Every human should have the basic right to grow their own food and take care of their property during this time of crisis. Many of these garden centers provide agricultural products to consumers, including fertilizers, tools, seeds, vegetable starts, ornamental plants, and many other ag-related products, which are essential to successful gardening. In addition to food, garden activities provide a healthy outlet, both physically and mentally, during a time when many could be confined to their homes. Depriving Georgians of the ability to cultivate their own land would not only be fundamentally wrong, but also damaging to public morale and the overall health of communities across the state.

Landscape professionals also provide essential services to Georgians as they protect public health, through maintaining our landscapes and boosting community morale. Poorly maintained landscapes, both commercial and residential, pose a threat to public health. Unkept green spaces increase the chance of injury to those utilizing them, experience higher crime rates, and decrease the morale of our communities. These industry professionals are trained to safely apply chemicals that reduce dangerous pests like ticks, fleas, and mosquitos. They prevent residential and commercial infestations of pests by maintaining established landscape plantings. The work of our industry's landscape professionals helps buffer the impacts of a crisis, such as COVID-19, on the mental well-being of each individual. Well maintained landscapes provide some sense of normalcy and creating peace amid all of the fear and uncertainty, making them essential to the health and happiness of our fellow Georgians.

Lastly, our industry is taking aggressive steps within our organizations to stop the transmission of COVID-19. Because our industry functions outside, this dramatically reduces the chances to come into contact with other individuals. Across the green industry, strong policies are being put in place to maintain social distancing with both clients and within our teams working in the field. We are all in this together, and the Green Industry in Georgia stands with our public officials to stop the rapid transmission of COVID-19 while continuing to perform essential functions in our communities across the state.

We are asking you, along with all of our elected officials, at the state, county, and local levels, to include all green industry firms in the list of essential businesses. By doing so, it would permit these businesses, which are so vital to their communities, to remain open as we progress through our COVID-19 responses and fulfill the needs of the citizens as they work through these difficult times.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Oxford, Chairman of GGIA
Lanie Riner, Vice-Chairman of GGIA

Sam Brown, Treasurer of GGIA
Jason McCarty, Past Chairman of GGIA