



State of Oklahoma
Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry

J Kevin Stitt
Governor

Blayne Arthur
Secretary of Agriculture

March 20, 2020

Governor Stitt,

Thank you for your continued leadership throughout the development and response of the COVID-19 outbreak in our state. Oklahoma's agriculture industry knows, by the nature of our business, the importance of taking proactive steps to stymie disease, and we appreciate your efforts in coordinating the many diverse community responses.

As you consider future measures to protect Oklahomans and limit the impact of COVID-19, the importance of continuity of business in our food supply chain cannot be overstated. Many sectors of Oklahoma's agriculture industry are vital to the food pipeline and ultimately Oklahomans' health and nutrition and should be considered "essential business" in the event of any potential state or local lockdown in Oklahoma.

Food availability and animal welfare are dependent upon the continuation of services that I would recommend be deemed "essential". Those who supply feed, seed, water, fertilizer, herbicides, or insecticide or care for animals, groves, greenhouses, nurseries, vineyards, forests, farms, and ranches and produce, transport, package, manufacture, process, and sell agriculture and food products cannot have their workforce depleted overnight without irreparable damage to this year's crop and negative implications on animal welfare and short- and long-term food availability. Agricultural labor shortages could significantly disrupt the food supply chain, exacerbating the challenges already faced by food retailers and consumers.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency also recognized the need for continued services by the agriculture and food sectors in the March 19, 2020 Memorandum on Identification of Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers During COVID-19 Response. This document (attached) recommends that states prioritize agriculture and food workers as "essential".

As you determine next steps, please consider deeming these integral parts of the food supply "essential" to allow Oklahomans to continue to have access to safe and healthy food now and in months and years to come.

Appended below is a list of Oklahoma organizations that support this request (Appendix 1) as well as an example of language that defines "essential business" in a manner that will ensure the continuity of business for our agricultural industry and food supply chain (Appendix 2).

I greatly appreciate all that you and your team have done to protect the health and interests of Oklahomans and know that agricultural and food producers in our state share that appreciation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Blayne Arthur".

Blayne Arthur
Oklahoma Secretary of Agriculture



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Appendix 1:

The undersigned organizations support this request.

American Farmers and Ranchers
Livestock Marketing Association
Oklahoma Agribusiness Retailers Association
Oklahoma Agricultural Cooperative Council
Oklahoma Cattlemen's Association
Oklahoma Cotton Council
Oklahoma Farm Bureau
Oklahoma Forestry Association
Oklahoma Grain and Feed Association
Oklahoma Pork Council
Oklahoma Seed Trade Association
Oklahoma Veterinary Medical Association
Oklahoma Wheat Growers Association
The Poultry Federation



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Appendix 2:

For the purposes of this Order, "Essential Businesses" means: i. Healthcare Operations and Essential Infrastructure; ii. Grocery stores, certified farmers' markets, 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). This includes stores that sell groceries and also sell other nongrocery products, and products necessary to maintaining the safety, sanitation, and essential operation of residences; iii. Food cultivation, including farming, livestock, and fishing; iv. Support of agricultural production including, manufacturers, processors, sellers, transporters, and suppliers of livestock, poultry, feed, seed, water, fertilizer, herbicides, or insecticide and those that care for animals, crops, groves, greenhouses, nurseries, vineyards, forests, farms, and ranches; v. Businesses that provide food, shelter, and social services, and other necessities of life for economically disadvantaged or otherwise needy individuals; vi. Newspapers, television, radio, and other media services; vi. Gas stations and auto-supply, auto-repair, and related facilities; viii. Banks and related financial institutions; ix. Hardware stores, farm stores, and garden centers; x. Plumbers, electricians, 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