

SUGGESTED MESSAGE POINTS TO POLICYMAKERS WHO MAY BE CONSIDERING WHICH BUSINESSES ARE “ESSENTIAL”

As our nation, communities and businesses react to the spread of COVID-19, [ORGANIZATION] 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 of time, with the intent of minimizing exposure to the virus.

[ORGANIZATION] 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.

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 hurricanes, floods and fires.

Because of these considerations, [ORGANIZATION] urges local, state, and federal policymakers 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.

[ORGANIZATION] 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.

Sincerely,