



March 20, 2020

The Honorable Mike DeWine  
Riffe Center, 30th Floor  
77 South High Street  
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Governor DeWine,

As our nation, communities and businesses react to the spread of COVID-19, the Ohio Nursery and Landscape Association (ONLA) commends the efforts of local, state, and federal governments to mitigate the impact and keep the public safe.

ONLA fully supports the sensible steps public health officials deem necessary to combat COVID-19. In some areas the discussion of how to best ensure the public's health has included the possibility of asking "non-essential" businesses to cease operations for a period of time, with the intent of minimizing exposure to the virus.

We urge public officials at all levels of government to consider the importance of horticulture growers (greenhouse and nursery), retail garden centers, and landscape contractors as essential services that will provide public benefit by providing access to fruit and vegetable plants, fruit trees, and other gardening supplies and services during any emergency declaration or quarantine scenario.

Ohio's Green Industry contributes \$14.5 billion to the state's economy and creates more than 90,000 jobs. Furthermore, our businesses directly benefit the health, safety, and wellness of residents across the state.

Greenhouse and nursery growers are the backbone of our industry, supplying the necessary plant material and additional resources required by homeowners, garden centers and landscapers to plant and maintain gardens and orchards. Spring is a critical time of year for these businesses. As temperatures warm, rapidly growing plant material requires prompt maintenance and care or it will quickly die. Any halt or delay in care of or shipment of our industry's products during this time of year will be detrimental to the Green Industry's ability to serve the public.

Garden centers serve as community cornerstones during times of crisis. Whether helping families produce home-grown fruits and vegetables, serving as mental and physical health relief, or providing wholesome activities for children, garden centers offer products and support that 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 gardening and maintaining or repairing their residences.

Landscapers are protectors of public health and safety. They perform essential treatments to lawns and green spaces to reduce the transmission of dangerous diseases through pests like mosquitoes, ticks, and fleas. They maintain greenspaces and properties, that, if left unkept, increase the chance of injuries. Tree care, such as removal of winter-damaged trees prior to spring storms, is a critical service to preventing injuries and damage to homes. In addition, crime rates increase in areas where green spaces are not maintained.



Lastly, our industry is taking aggressive steps to comply with CDC guidelines and using the utmost care and caution to stop the transmission of COVID-19. Our industry functions primarily outdoors—this greatly reduces the spread of the virus between individuals. Strong policies are being shared to maintain social distancing with clients and within our teams that are working in the field.

Because of these considerations, ONLA urges local, state, and federal policymakers to consider horticulture growers, retail garden centers, and landscape contractors as “essential” and allowed to exercise the option to remain open to support their communities during these trying times.

Ohio’s Green Industry stands with our public officials to stop the rapid transmission of COVID-19 while also continuing to perform those essential functions that are necessary within our communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken Fisher". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ken Fisher  
Executive Director  
Ohio Nursery and Landscape Association