

March 19, 2020

Attn: Commissioner Gary Black
Subject: Retail Garden Centers are Essential

Dear Commissioner Black,

The Georgia Green Industry Association would like to applaud the efforts of our state leadership 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. One such example of a preventative measure, which is causing significant concern in our industry, is the request of 'non-essential' retail operations to close for a while, to reduce possible exposure to the virus. While we fully support prudent decisions to help prevent the spread of the virus, we would ask that our elected public officials include our retail garden centers among the essential businesses that were allowed to remain open as a service to the public.

The Green Industry contributes 8 billion dollars to the Georgia economy annually and represents 83,000 jobs. Most Green Industry businesses rely on spring sales to make it through the year. While the economic impact of our industry is indeed substantial, we would also urge you to consider the direct services and indirect health benefits provided through retail garden centers 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. 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. If our retail garden centers are forced to close, Georgians will not have access to this productive outlet while they are quarantined to their homes.

One other point to note is that research has shown that even low levels of UV light destroy COVID-19. Garden centers display their plants and other products in both direct and indirect sunlight. This makes purchases from retail garden centers some of the safest purchases that can be made.

We are asking you, along with all of our elected officials, at the state, the county, and the local levels, to include retail garden centers in their 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