

New Jersey Department of Agriculture: The Power of Flowers

Life in New Jersey, in fact everywhere, has been fundamentally changed by the COVID-19 pandemic. As we adjust to this new reality, it has been immensely helpful to have proactive and effective leadership through Governor Murphy's Executive Orders on agriculture being an essential business and thus continued to be allowed to operate under prescribed practices as directed.

In this time of crisis, in which a very important step is to create social distance between ourselves and others, we are all sacrificing the daily routines and interactions that comfort us in normal times. This, of course, has massive impacts on businesses, even those agricultural businesses that have continued to operate, as consumers lead self-isolated lives.

The essential of food continues to be in demand, even though it gets to consumers in a much different way than they were before this pandemic. For example, restaurants have switched almost entirely to takeout/pickup and delivery service. Grocery stores, farms, supermarkets, and food distributors also have ramped up the ability for customers to call in orders and pick them up curbside or have at-home delivery.

Farmers who provide the essentials are reworking their planting, harvesting and business models to comply with the directives of health officials, especially as relates to gatherings of people.

In this time of solitude, it can be difficult to keep the struggles of others in mind, as we are faced with many hardships of our own. But this is the time to **buy locally** wherever it is safely possible.

Right now, as we enter the Easter season, greenhouses and growers across New Jersey are sitting with millions of dollars of plants, bulbs and flowers that would have been destined for church decorations and altars, business gatherings that are not happening, some weddings and other celebrations.

These flowers' schedules cannot be stopped. They are bursting to bloom right now, when spring normally pops with color, optimism and a fresh, magical reminder to all of us of gentle spring expressions of love, beauty, and caring for others.

These plants and flowers serve a meaningful and heartfelt purpose even in the midst of our isolation. As it becomes more important to support one another in whatever way possible – through a call to a neighbor or a smile when someone walks by our house – sending a plant or flower to someone you wish you could have regular interaction with becomes incredibly important.

These gestures of sending plants and flowers will help those people who are feeling lonely or cut off from the world due to the necessity of social distancing. Flowers bring color and radiance to their homes at a time when they need it most.

New Jersey agricultural businesses of all sorts value the trust given them as they have been deemed essential during this time, and they are committed to operating responsibly for their employees and you, the consumer. Please abide by any restrictions on the number of people they may have at their businesses at a given time, or other considerations to enhance social distancing, so that they may continue to serve you.

When you re-stock your pantry with necessities or go to appointments that can continue, please add a flower or plant from a responsible local business to your list, especially if you can help a local farming family. They truly and gratefully will appreciate your help.

Flowers and plants are not only those things that poets pine over. They are truly a necessity of everyday life. Why not bring a bit of joy into the worlds of people you miss or cannot visit?

Flowers are therapeutic and point the way to sunnier times.

Sincerely,

Secretary of Agriculture

Douglas H. Fisher