MFGA Guidance and call to Action – COVID19 AND OUR BUSINESS

From: MFGA Execute Board

Jeff Doherty, President

Ed Bemis, Vice President

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Jason Wentworth- MFGA Legislative Advocate

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, the Massachusetts Flower Growers’ Association has maintained that the services we provide are, in fact, essential, and have referenced the Governor’s own guidance documents and those issued by the federal Department of Homeland Security (on which the Governor’s order is based) and the determinations of states such as New York, New Jersey and Connecticut that have operated off of the same Homeland Security document. However, we have stressed that anyone operating after the Tuesday, March 24 noontime deadline given in the Order maintain the strictest adherence to the Center for Disease Control’s guidelines and practiced extreme social distancing. This care and precaution is good for the public health, good for our employees, and shows that our industry cares more about human lives than profit.

Our ability as a community and as an industry to recover is dependent upon the actions we take now. We are all aware of the growing numbers of people who have tested positive. In this climate, we all need to ask ourselves the question: “what risk am I taking?” Is there a way to conduct business, but do so in a way that ensures ZERO contact and, therefore, no risk of infection to both employee and customer alike. We feel there is, but it requires a strict adherence to the following. There will be no second chances if we get this wrong.

**Every member, whether they are operating a retail location, nursery, greenhouse, wholesale or rewholesale facility, must:**

* Adopt a remote sales method (whether by phone, web, email) removing any opportunity for close contact with the public
* Use an overabundance of caution and either make “curbside” product drops in their facilities’ parking lots or load materials directly into customers’ trunks or truck beds (similar to, and possibly safer than, the current model employed by restaurants serving their patrons “to go”)…again, the point is ZERO close contact with the public. NO ONE CAN LOAD DIRECTLY INTO A VEHICLE’S CAB OR PASSENGER AREA. If the trunk is full, the customer will have to load it themselves.
* Because the risk of transmission exists even in open air, close even the external portions of our retail operations to customer foot traffic. We’ve all seen people milling about and then finding themselves in front of the same plant. It sounds funny, but it’s deadly serious. All aspects of the members’ premises, with the exception of parking lots or curb frontage, would be off-limits to foot traffic, and signage would be posted reaffirming this.
* Minimize (if possible, eliminate) cash transactions. If more than one person is working at the sales register, the manager should designate one person to handle money and another to handle produce/product. Businesses can round their prices to the nearest dollar so they can reduce the acceptance of coins, and minimize the handling of change. Wipe down credit card readers and POS equipment periodically and between transactions. Online payment application platforms used on smartphones, such as Venmo,Square or PayPal, are a viable option to facilitate transactions for on-site pick-ups and deliveries.
* Mandate that all employees maintain the CDC-recommended distance at all times, whether caring for plants, loading and unloading plant materials, at registers, etc. ZERO close contact.
* Sanitize all tools and/or common work surfaces after every use. Nothing should be shared use unless there is an accurate record that it was cleaned. You use something. You clean it. You move on.
* Any transportation used by members, whether on- or off-site will be limited to one-person per vehicle. Of course, those vehicles would be sanitized after every use.

Additionally, we ask that our members to do the following:

**GENERAL COMMUNICATION**

* All employees will be provided both guidance from the member business on what they can and cannot do on the job, and continue to be apprised of the latest state and federal guidelines
* Whether through signage, social media, email newsletter, etc, our members will relay the steps they are taking to ensure public health and prevention to their customers

We understand that many members have already taken some or all of these extreme measures. For that, we are extremely grateful. You are positive exemplars of who we are and what we do. No one wants a customer or an employee to become ill or, God forbid, lose their life. In this time, we need to take drastic steps. We understand that taking these steps may not be easy for everyone. In order to do business and both maintain our reputation and the public health, we see no other alternative. This crisis is nowhere near done…and that’s the reality. We either need to learn to live and work within this reality, or sit it out and wait. We can’t be the cause of someone else’s pain and suffering.

**AND NOW WE ASK THAT YOU SPEAK UP!**

**Without specificity in either the Governor’s Order or Guidance Document that states the services we provide are “essential”, our members are at risk. We may be doing the right thing and already following strict guidelines but, if you’re considered “non-essential”, cities and towns have broad authority to shut you down.**

**MFGA, as an association, has been pressing the essential nature of this industry, and our capacity to both remain open while doing the right thing for the common good. It’s clear that Governor Charlie Baker, Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito, Housing and Economic Development Secretary Mike Kennealy, Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Katie Theoharides, and your area legislators need to understand what is at stake, that we put the health and safety of our customers and employees first and are willing to voluntarily self-regulate, and that our employees depend on wages to support their families.**

Here is a template, along with a list of emails and telephone numbers of those to contact, and some guidance below. Our Board will continue to work for you, but we need you to lend your individual voices, now more than ever. We need to call and send emails immediately. If you have questions, please don’t hesitate to contact us.

Governor Charlie Baker

Telephone: (617) 725-4005

Email: constituent.services@state.ma.us

Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito

Telephone: (617) 725-4005

Email: [constituent.services@state.ma.us](mailto:constituent.services@state.ma.us)

Secretary, Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development Mike Kennealy

Telephone: (617) 788-3610

Email: michael.kennealy@state.ma.us

Secretary, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs Katie Theoharides

Telephone: (617) 626-1000

Email: Kathleen.theoharides@state.ma.us

**How to find your Legislator:**

Visit <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/wheredoivotema/bal/myelectioninfo.aspx>

And enter the appropriate required information.

It will show you ALL of your elected officials. Scroll down and click on the names of your State Senator and State Representative.

**EMAIL GUIDANCE:**

If you are sending an email, please send it to ALL addresses listed…the Governor and Lieutenant Governor share the constituent services email address ([Kathleen.theoharides@state.ma.us](mailto:Kathleen.theoharides@state.ma.us), [michael.kennealy@state.ma.us](mailto:michael.kennealy@state.ma.us), [constituent.services@state.ma.us](mailto:constituent.services@state.ma.us)).

**In the subject header, please use variations on the following themes:**

“PLEASE DESIGNATE GARDEN CENTERS AS ESSENTIAL NOW!”

“AGRICULTURE IS ESSENTIAL! HORTICULTURE IS ESSENTIAL!”

“THE GREEN INDUSTRY IN MASS. IS ESSENTIAL!”

**For the message, please begin with the following:**

“Dear Governor Baker, Lieutenant Governor Polito, Secretary Kennealy and Secretary Theoharides,”

**For the message, please use the following introductory paragraph:**

“In keeping with the official actions of surrounding states like New   
Hampshire, Maine, Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey, we ask that you immediately designate garden centers, nurseries, greenhouses, and landscape services as ‘essential services’.

Now, the most important part; your story. Please tell the addressees the following:

* Details about your business (nursery? Wholesaler? Retailer? Landscape Services? If retail, What kind of products do you grow/sell? Be brief but specific)
* How many years have you been in business
* If it’s a multigenerational operation, please mention that fact and how many generations
* How many people do you employ
* Talk about Philanthropic contributions to the community (eg sponsored youth athletics, etc)
* What’s at stake? What do you stand to lose if we are explicitly shut down?
* If you are still open and have already implemented policies to protect your employees and customers, attach photos illustrating that!

**PHONE GUIDANCE:**

Use the “email message” as a script, and don’t forget to MAKE IT PERSONAL!!!

If you reach a voicemail, leave a message…but don’t forget to give the details and your contact info so they can get back to you. Please call the numbers of ALL of the government officials we mentioned!

**And please call AND email! We need people to know that we CAN do our work AND ensure safety.**

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In closing, this IS the unfortunate reality we face; where we are fighting for the right to ply our trade. MFGA is fighting for ALL of our members rights, but please remember the conditions we find ourselves in. You MUST adopt ALL of the practices outlined. If you do, we will fight tooth and nail for you. If you choose to ignore these practices and do not heed these warnings, you are not only risking your business, your reputation and your employees’ and customers’ safety, but also that of your fellow members.

**Please do the right thing.**

**Also go to** [**www.massflowergrowers.com**](http://www.massflowergrowers.com)