

# PRESS RELEASE

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## **A STATEMENT FROM THE MICHIGAN NURSERY & LANDSCAPE ASSOCIATION ON COVID-19**

**OKEMOS, MI, April 14, 2020**

On behalf of Michigan's Green Industry – the nursery and greenhouse growers, retail garden centers, lawn care, landscape maintenance, design/build, tree care, and irrigation and water management firms – we present this statement on COVID-19.

The majority of our businesses are family-owned and many are multi-generational. Our industry is committed to providing their products and services in a way that prevents us from neither contracting nor spreading the virus.

We take our associate and customer safety and health very seriously. We employ regular safety training and enforce strong safety standards on the job. The very nature of our work, which is performed outdoors individually or in small teams with little public contact, poses a lower risk of contracting or spreading COVID-19. In addition, we have in place many initiatives that allow us to work safely with zero-contact and CDC social distancing to protect our associates and customers. We recognize the dangers with this virus and if we are able to go back to work, we are prepared to implement the even stricter Federal and State guidelines to make it safe for our employees and customers at our independent retail garden centers and landscape/lawn care work sites.

Spring is a critical time of year for our industry due to the abundance of growth now that requires prompt maintenance and care. Any halt or delay in our services during this time of year only magnifies potential safety problems and becomes much more difficult to maintain later in the year. And, we can implement guidelines so we can work safely!

Our independent retail garden center businesses are brimming with flowering plants, nursery stock and vegetable plants – ready for customers to safely purchase for their home garden needs. If we miss this primary window to sell our plant products, including many that are perishable, our businesses and our employees could face an entire year without income. And, we can implement guidelines so we can work safely!

The terms being used now to describe the backbone businesses of Michigan's economy—essential and non-essential—are as disheartening as the virus. We need to change the conversation immediately to what it should have been from the start—making it about a safe workplace.

If we must use these descriptors then we are essential!

Our landscape industry—including lawn care, landscape maintenance, design/build, tree care, and irrigation and water management:

- performs regular maintenance to mow, prune, control weeds, and inspect for safety and security issues;
- performs essential treatments to reduce the spread of dangerous and deadly diseases transmitted by pests like mosquitoes, ticks, and fleas;
- removes fallen trees and mitigating overhead hazards from wind effects;
- manages invasive species; and
- keeps public and private pathways free from obstruction and potential risk.

Our Independent Retail Garden Centers:

- carry vegetable plants and products to grow your own food;
- carry vegetable seeds to grow your own plants;
- carry fruit trees and small fruit plants like strawberries, raspberries, potatoes, etc;
- carry native plants, annuals, and pollinator friendly plants that promote our healthy ecosystem;
- teach customers how to “grow your own”;
- play an important role in our citizens' mental health with plants for their gardening activity.

Under normal circumstances we believe in our First Amendment Right of the people to peaceably assemble. These are not normal circumstances and we are concerned that public protests will cause undue stress of our first responders. Therefore, we do not support or endorse the public protests planned for this week and have encouraged our members not to participate in these events.

Our message is clear—we can provide a safe workplace for our employees and we can provide our products and services with zero-contact to our customers. We are pleading to be allowed to go back to work, relieve the unemployment system, generate tax revenue for the State, and to save Michigan's Green Industry.

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