



**PO Box 4666  
Augusta, ME 04330**

**[MngmtPlus@aol.com](mailto:MngmtPlus@aol.com)**

**Tel: 207-623-6430  
Fax: 207-623-6431**

March 18, 2020

Dear Policymakers,

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

The discussion of how to best ensure the public health has included the possibility of asking “non-essential” retail operations to shut their doors for a period of time, with the intent of minimizing exposure to the virus.

MELNA is fully in support of sensible steps public health officials may deem necessary to combat COVID-19. Just last week in advance of Gov. Mills recommendation that large events cancel, MELNA canceled its largest event, the Maine Flower Show, at a disastrous economic loss. MELNA members are willing to do our part in these remarkable times. At the same time, we urge public officials at all levels of government to consider garden retailers among those retail operations determined to be “essential” and allow these business owners the option to stay open as a public service.

The horticulture industry in Maine comprises more than 1,000 firms that collectively employ nearly 12,000 people, with 5,000 of them on a full-time basis. With more than \$100 million in annual sales of specialty crops, over half of which are grown locally, the plants produced and sold by the horticulture industry of Maine are among the top three specialty crops in the state and are vital to the strength of the state’s natural resource-based economy. This industry, built on a foundation of diverse specialty crops, strengthens the state’s overall economy by paying employees an estimated \$110 million in wages each year.

Americans are resilient and resourceful in the face of adversity provided the opportunity to produce their own food and manage any shortage in the supply chain. Millions of Americans engage in food production at home, and more are sure to follow as the COVID-19 crisis unfolds.

With thousands of garden retailers serving communities across North America, these stores provide much-needed services. Whether helping Americans produce home-grown fruits and vegetables, as Americans did during WWII as Victory Gardens, as a mental and physical health relief or providing wholesome activities for children, garden centers offer products and support that individuals and 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 growing, gardening, maintaining or repairing their residences.

The items sold by garden retailers are the necessary tools for people to practice safe distancing at home while staying productive. This greatly boosts their morale, self-esteem and productivity; all greatly benefitting their mental and emotional health.

It is also important to note that many garden retailers have been cornerstones in their communities for decades, providing essential supplies in past emergency situations, such as hurricanes, floods and fires.

Because of these considerations, MELNA urges local, state, and federal policymakers to consider garden retailers among those operations determined to be “essential” retail outlets that can exercise the option to remain open to support their communities during these trying times.

MELNA also urges all business owners to look to guidelines of the CDC and state and local health authorities and to use the utmost care and caution when considering how to proceed with operations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Donald F. Sproul". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Donald F. Sproul  
Executive Director  
Maine Landscape & Nursery Association