

March 18, 2020

The Honorable Greg Abbott
Office of the Governor
State Insurance Building, 1100 San Jacinto
Austin, Texas 78701

Governor Abbott,

We are writing to you today in consideration of the rapidly developing government response to COVID-19 and our desire to underscore the importance of agriculture being declared an “essential business” for any potential lockdown in the State of Texas.

Our industry knows, by the nature of our business, the importance of taking proactive steps to stymie disease and we appreciate your leadership in coordinating the many diverse community responses across our state. Recently, state and local leaders across the U.S. have taken the additional step of instituting community or statewide lockdowns to force the social distancing of the populace while exempting a few “essential businesses”. We, the undersigned organizations, believe agricultural operations should qualify for this exemption should your office consider a state lockdown or advise local governments on similar proposals.

As you are aware, Texas agriculture encompasses many types of businesses involved in plant and animal production and is all critically important to our state’s economy. However, the importance of a functioning agriculture industry goes beyond our economic impact as it constitutes our ability to care for our citizens by supplying their essential needs. Given the nature of our businesses, those who supply feed, seed, water, fertilizer, herbicides, or insecticide or care for animals, groves, greenhouses, nurseries, vineyards, forests, farms, and ranches cannot have their workforce depleted overnight without irreparable damage to this year’s crop and negative implications on short- and long-term animal welfare. In addition, agricultural labor shortages could significantly disrupt the food supply chain, exacerbating the challenges already faced by food retailers and consumers.

As you and our local leaders look at the next containment steps, we want to ensure that establishments that produce, transport, package, manufacture, process and sell these products and services also receive the same exemptions as they are vital to the health and wellbeing of Texans.

We realize the enormous task facing our elected officials and appreciate the unprecedented nature of this pandemic. Please know Texas agricultural producers stand with you in making shared sacrifices to see our state through this crisis. We only ask that the unique and basic nature of our industry warrant exemptions to allow for the continuity of Texas agricultural operations.

Sincerely,

Agriculture Teachers Association of Texas
Ducks Unlimited
Earthmoving Contractors Association of Texas
Exotic Wildlife Association
Farm Credit Bank of Texas
Farmers Cooperative Compress

Independent Cattlemen's Association of Texas
Livestock Marketing Association of Texas
Lower Rio Grande Valley Water District Managers Association
Plains Cotton Cooperative Association
Plains Cotton Growers, Inc.
PYCO Industries, Inc.
South Texas Cotton & Grain Association
South Texas Property Rights Association
Texas Agriculture Cooperative Council
Texas Agricultural Land Trust
Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association
Texas Association of Agricultural Consultants
Texas Association of Dairymen
Texas Cattle Feeders Association
Texas Citrus Mutual
Texas Corn Producers Association
Texas Cotton Association
Texas Cotton Ginners Association
Texas Farm Bureau
Texas Forestry Association
Texas Grain and Feed Association
Texas Grain Sorghum Association
Texas Independent Ginner Association
Texas International Produce Association
Texas Irrigation Council
Texas Logging Council
Texas Nursery & Landscape Association
Texas Poultry Federation
Texas Quarter Horse Association
Texas Seed Trade Association
Texas Sheep and Goat Raisers Association
Texas Wheat Producers Association
Texas Wine and Grape Growers Association
Texas Veterinary Medical Association
US Custom Harvesters
Western Equipment Dealers Association
Western Peanut Growers Association

CC: The Honorable Sid Miller
The Honorable Charles Perry
The Honorable Bob Hall
The Honorable Drew Springer