March 18, 2020

The Honorable Greg Abbott
Office of the Governor
1100 San Jacinto Blvd.
Austin, TX 78701

Dear Governor Abbott:

As our nation, communities and businesses react to the spread of COVID-19, the Texas Nursery & Landscape Association 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.

The Texas Nursery & Landscape Association is in full support of sensible steps public health officials may deem necessary to combat COVID-19. At the same, 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. Consumer horticulture contributes $23 billion to the Texas economy and creates more than 227,000 Texas jobs.

But the story doesn’t end there. **Horticulture benefits the health and happiness** of every citizen and every community in Texas. 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 in community gardens,** and more are sure to follow as the COVID-19 crisis unfolds. With hundreds of garden retailers serving communities across Texas, 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. Other products are necessary tools and supplies to garden and take care of the landscape. 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. It is also important to note that many garden retailers have been cornerstones in their communities for decades, providing vital supplies in past emergency situations, such as hurricanes, floods and fires. Because of these considerations, the Texas Nursery & Landscape Association 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.

The Texas Nursery & Landscape Association 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,

Amy Graham
President/CEO