

Greetings, Mass. Agriculture and all its friends,



Normally today is one of my most favorite days of the year-Agriculture Day at the State House! That's not just since I've been Commissioner. As a farmer who was a member, officer and past president of MNLA, I attended for many years like so many of you do, lobbying on behalf of Ag in general, and each of our specific sectors particularly (along with seeing old friends and enjoying the fabulous presentation of delicious and beautiful MA Ag products).

Sadly, due to the Coronavirus the organizers wisely cancelled the event on March 11th-funny, that seems like a lifetime ago.

Well, Ag Day had to be cancelled, but MA Agriculture remains open for business. Governor Baker on Monday issued a new [Order](#) relative to non-essential businesses to close in person operations until April 7th.

Accompanying that order is a list of fourteen critical essential services of which Food and Agriculture is one.

That list of allowed activities is pretty expansive:

Food and Agriculture

- Workers supporting groceries, pharmacies and other retail, including farmers markets and farm stands, that sells food and beverage products, including liquor stores
- Restaurant carry-out and quick serve food operations - Carry-out and delivery food employees
- Food manufacturer employees and their supplier employees—to include those employed in food processing (packers, meat processing, cheese plants, milk plants, produce, etc.) facilities; livestock, poultry, seafood slaughter facilities; pet and animal feed processing facilities; human food facilities producing by-products for animal food; beverage production facilities; and the production of food packaging
- Farm workers to include those employed in animal food, feed, and ingredient production, packaging, and distribution; manufacturing, packaging, and distribution of veterinary drugs; truck delivery and transport; farm and fishery labor needed to produce our food supply domestically
- Farm workers and support service workers to include those who field crops; commodity inspection; fuel ethanol facilities; storage facilities; and other agricultural inputs
- Workers supporting the seafood and fishing industry
- Employees and firms supporting food, feed, and beverage distribution, including warehouse workers, vendor-managed inventory controllers and blockchain managers
- Workers supporting the sanitation of all food manufacturing processes and operations from wholesale to retail

- Company cafeterias - in-plant cafeterias used to feed employees; food service workers in residential schools with students who are unable to leave campus
- Workers in food testing labs in private industries and in institutions of higher education
- Workers essential for assistance programs and government payments
- Employees of companies engaged in the production of chemicals, medicines, vaccines, and other substances used by the food and agriculture industry, including pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, minerals, enrichments, and other agricultural production aids
- Animal agriculture workers to include those employed in veterinary health; manufacturing and distribution of animal medical materials, animal vaccines, animal drugs, feed ingredients, feed, and bedding, etc.; transportation of live animals, animal medical materials; transportation of deceased animals for disposal; raising of animals for food; animal production operations; slaughter and packing plants and associated regulatory and government workforce
- Organizations and workers responsible for the care and custody of animals, pets and livestock
- Workers who support the manufacture and distribution of forest products, including, but not limited to timber, paper, and other wood products
- Employees engaged in the manufacture and maintenance of equipment and other infrastructure necessary to agricultural production and distribution

The list provides clear acknowledgement that production of food and many businesses that support that mission are essential. I recognize there are at this writing a lot of unanswered questions about our largest sector, Horticulture, which is under consideration. Please know we understand industry's need for clear guidance, and this matter is one of our very highest priorities.

We see on the news that something that our society generally takes so much for granted, the food system, isn't being taken for granted anymore. All of a sudden, people are starting to wake up to the facts of what it takes for the food in their refrigerators and kitchen cabinets or at our favorite restaurants to get there. From our farmers, to our packers, to our shippers and rail workers and truckers, to our manufacturers or directly to our grocery workers, the country has quickly become aware of the absolutely critical role every point in the supply chain plays, and that includes the MA Food System.

That Food System has the same starting point throughout the world: agriculture and fisheries (and to a much, much lesser degree than it once was, hunting). We've all heard comments from time to time made from within our industry that farmers are not appreciated as they should be. Well, that has all changed in just a matter of days.

So with that new higher sense of appreciation and increased visibility, it appears to suggest a critical question: what is MA Agriculture doing in response to the Coronavirus?

I understand you are all in different situations, with different business operations that all run a little differently, and with all kinds of unique family and personal considerations. I also understand that the Coronavirus emergency has caused tremendous disruption to the MA agricultural economy, similar to what we see in the global economy.

Acknowledging all of that uncertainty, I submit to you that it's time for MA Agriculture to lead by example and show the almost seven million people in MA just what you do 24/7/365 year after year!

In a world that's full of anxiety, it's you who are the connection to the natural order. It's you who make the food, grow the plants, care for the bees, grow the fin and shellfish, and produce the timber that Americans just take for granted will be there whenever they want to buy them and in any quantity. All of a sudden people are starting to think about how that happens. So employing the lemonade from a (huge and awful) lemon analogy, this is an admittedly odd opportunity to demonstrate and remind our residents of all the great things you do and the challenges you overcome pretty much every day to produce your products.

MA Ag has been through a lot since it began in the 1600's: wars, all kinds of disasters, economic downturns, and yes, also the 1918 Influenza Pandemic-and it's gotten through all of them, just like it's going to get through this one. There is no one more resilient, no more creative problem solver, no harder worker, and no better steward of the working landscape than the Massachusetts Farmer!

I frequently remind folks in spoken and written remarks that if you visit Minute Man National Historic Park in Concord and look at Daniel Chester French's iconic statue, *The Minute Man*, you'll see a Massachusetts Farmer leaving his plough by his left hand as he holds his musket in his right, off to drive the British out during the Battle of Concord in 1775.



That's your legacy-and it's time to go into battle again, but this time we don't want you to put your plows down, we need you to keep doing what you're doing! There's no denying it's going to be hard and there's going to be a lot of steps both forwards and backwards, but at the end of the day this war will be over and MA Agriculture will deserve to be proud of its contributions.

Our mission at MDAR has always been and will continue to be to keep the Massachusetts food supply safe and secure and to keep Massachusetts agriculture economically and environmentally sound. I promise you we are working as hard as we can to do that to the very best of our abilities and resources.

We have established a [COVID-19 Resources for Agriculture](#) page at our website. Our bulletins (we are constantly adding them) and other important information sources are there. We will continue to update it regularly.

Please support all of our hardworking farming families-promote all MA Agriculture along with your own operation through all your communication means to encourage consumers to seek out #MassGrown produce and items! www.mass.gov/massgrown #buylocal

I look forward to shaking your hands and hugging many dear friends next spring at Agriculture Day at the State House 2021 when we share war stories and celebrate MA Agriculture's management of natural resources that contributed to the global Coronavirus response.

It's an honor and privilege to be your Commissioner-be safe and be smart, everyone!

With enormous respect for all you do,

Best regards,



John Lebeaux

MDAR's mission is to ensure the long-term viability of agriculture in Massachusetts. Through its four divisions – Agricultural Conservation & Technical Assistance, Agricultural Markets, Animal Health, and Crop and Pest Services – MDAR strives to support, regulate and enhance the rich diversity of the Commonwealth's agricultural community to promote economically and environmentally sound food safety and animal health measures, and fulfill agriculture's role in energy conservation and production. For more information, visit MDAR's website at www.mass.gov/agr.

