



March 19, 2020

The Honorable Governor Eric Holcomb
200 W Washington Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Dear Governor Holcomb:

Thank you for the efforts of your Administration to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Hoosiers are grateful for the tireless work of your team to protect our citizens and our economy.

A critical foundation of economic recovery will be a steady supply of food. Photos flood the internet of empty grocery aisles caused primarily by hoarding; but if consumers are to regain confidence in the economy, a continuous and plentiful supply of food will be essential.

Agribusinesses are concerned about and taking necessary steps to prevent the further spread of the new coronavirus disease (COVID-19). This is a difficult and unprecedented time for many of us. As the Administration considers additional measures to manage the spread of the virus, you will no doubt hear some calls for shutting down segments of the economy. While there may be some segments where that makes sense, we ask that you keep in mind the importance of this agricultural input supply chain to the animals, farmers and the consumers who rely on that productivity.

We are now entering the spring season, the busiest time of the year for farmers and the agribusinesses who supply and support them. Continuous flows of seed, fertilizers, crop protection and custom application are most important in the spring. Even missing one or two days in tight windows for planting, fertilizing or applying crop protection can have significant negative impacts on crop production and farm income. If those crops don't get planted the entire supply chain all the way to the consumer will suffer. A smoothly-functioning supply chain from the producers of these farm inputs through distribution and ultimately to the farm are critically important, especially in this season. Furthermore, while we understand and appreciate the efforts to slow this pandemic, we also must recognize that animals must continue to have access to food and therefore, our industry must be able to manufacture, transport and sell ingredients, feed and pet food.



Specifically:

- As some sections of the economy shut down, or are directed to do so, it is imperative that those closings provide flexibility for this agricultural supply chain to continue functioning. Suggestions that “retailers” temporarily close need to specifically separate consumer retailers from agricultural retailers. Most of these businesses operate in rural areas where distancing is less of an issue than it is in cities, and that should mitigate the risk. We request agricultural retailers and other segments of the supply chain providing critical products to farmers and ranchers be deemed “essential” and exempt from any federal or state shutdown or curfew orders.
- The U.S. Department of Transportation’s Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration’s (FMCSA) waiver of Hours of Service (HOS) requirements for those transporting medical supplies is helpful to that cause. But it is having unintended consequences as truckers who would normally haul farm supplies (still subject to HOS) drop those shipments in favor of medical shipments that are now exempt. This is hampering the flow of these products to ag retailers and to the farm gate. We suggest that Indiana work with federal counterparts to broaden the HOS waiver to include farm supplies and other products that need continued time-sensitive access to a functioning supply chain, including crop inputs and animal feed. We further suggest an extension of Driver CDLs that may be coming up for renewal, including required DOT physicals and mandatory drug testing as they are considered non-emergency visits. Alternative sites for submission of samples for these tests – or delays in the requirements to submit them - should reduce the strain at medical offices that have bigger issues to address. Finally, renewing an agricultural waiver that allows non-CDL drivers to assist in retail agricultural deliveries to the farm and/or field would help relieve an already-tight driver situation and provide meaningful work for employees facing reduced work opportunities in this environment.
- We suggest that the Indiana Department of Homeland Security (IDHS) designate agricultural retailers, grain elevators, feed mills, and other parts of the farm supply chain be considered “essential” critical infrastructure and allowed to continue to operate and move essential products for delivery to farmers during any mandatory shutdowns.
- The Department of Labor’s (DOL) temporary agricultural guest worker program (H-2A) must continue to function in a timely manner to ensure a steady supply labor that is



needed to produce and harvest these crops. Any shortages of labor in this area will become acutely evident as US produce grocers seasonally switch to more domestic products.

- The Office of the Indiana State Chemist (OISC) should provide flexibility for pesticide applicator license training and license expiration dates. Having licenses expire or training deadlines pass while those services are largely unavailable will create an unnecessary but avoidable problem.

Please do not hesitate to call on us if we can help you address this challenge.

Sincerely,

Amy Cornell
ACI President