

May 4, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, and Leader McCarthy:

The fresh produce industry is committed to the safety of our workers, whether harvest crews in the field or employees in packing facilities, all while keeping the food supply chain moving. We are an essential part of feeding American consumers and the world at a time when our healthy fruits and vegetables are more in need than ever.

Recent accusations regarding the employee protections in agriculture are unfounded. With every stage of the emerging COVID-19 crisis, our industry has worked hard to embrace all public health advice for social distancing, personal and facility hygiene, face coverings and more. While awaiting specific on-farm guidance from the CDC, OSHA and FDA, producers have implemented protocols based on general guidance from these agencies, as well as USDA and state and local public health and agriculture officials. Some of these recommendations that have been implemented include but are not limited to those referenced here:

- Centers for Disease Control^{1,2},
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration^{3,4},
- Department of Labor⁵,
- Department of Homeland Security⁶,
- Food and Drug Administration⁷
- U.S. Department of Agriculture⁸

These efforts have resulted in changes to operations across the country in order to keep our workers safe while bringing food to the American people.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/critical-workers/implementing-safety-practices.html>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/shared-housing/index.html>

³ <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/standards.html>

⁵ <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2020/03/19/usda-and-dol-announce-information-sharing-assist-h-2a-employers>

⁶ https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/Version_3.0_CISA_Guidance_on_Essential_Critical_Infrastructure_Workers_4.pdf

⁷ <https://www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/food-safety-and-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19>

⁸ <https://www.rd.usda.gov/coronavirus> (multifamily housing FAQ)

Furthermore, beyond the government guidance mentioned above, the produce industry has enhanced these government recommendations and provided our strongest commitment to workforce safety:

- Grower groups have partnered with hospitals and health care officials to create a program where doctors and nurses visit employer worksites to discuss COVID-19 risks and provide educational services.
- Grower organizations have sponsored Public Service Announcements in English, Spanish and other languages in communities with a high density of agricultural workers advising them about the proper safety steps to take not only on the job but in their communities.
- Industry organizations have partnered with state extension service to produce educational videos and material in English and Spanish for workers to educate them about proper sanitation and healthcare practices.
- Grower groups have partnered with worker advocates to develop guidelines for strong state enforcement of workplace and housing standards.
- Beyond our farms and our own employee housing, companies are providing workers advice on in-home sanitation, social distancing, and recuperative services.

These steps reflect our continued commitment to the safety and wellbeing of our employees, the safety of the products they harvest, and the health of all Americans who must continue to consume healthy foods as part of our public health fight back against this virus. Without a safe and healthy work force, we could not continue to meet that challenge.

Going forward, we will continually update our safety protocols in accordance with all government guidance. We also look forward to working with lawmakers on both sides of aisle and with the administration to ensure a safe workplace for our employees and a safe and abundant food supply for our country. In that regard, we note that we need to secure additional personal protective equipment – farmers have some reserves of these supplies but as this crisis lingers, we are concerned about the ability to secure supplies in the future.

Sincerely

United Fresh Produce Association
American Mushroom Institute
National Potato Council
National Council of Agriculture Employers
National Onion Association
National Peach Council
National Watermelon Association
Produce Marketing Association
US Apple Association
US Sweet Potato Council
United Potato Growers of America
Gulf Coast Watermelon Association
Indiana-Illinois Watermelon Association
Maryland-Delaware Watermelon Association
Northwest Horticultural Council

Southeast Produce Council
Western Watermelon Association
California Apple Commission
California Blueberry Association
California Blueberry Commission
California Cherry Growers and Industry Association
California Citrus Mutual
California Farm Bureau Federation
California Fresh Fruit Association
California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement
California Pear Growers
California Strawberry Commission
Grower-Shipper Association of Central California
Olive Growers Council of California
Western Growers
Colorado Potato Administrative Committee
Florida Citrus Mutual
Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association
Florida Tomato Exchange
Florida Watermelon Association
Georgia Berry Exchange
Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association
Georgia Watermelon Association
Idaho Grower-Shipper Association
Idaho Potato Commission
United Potato Growers of Idaho
Maine Potato Board
Michigan Apple Committee
Michigan Asparagus Advisory Board
Michigan Blueberry Advisory Committee
Michigan State Horticultural Society
Potato Growers of Michigan, Inc.
Empire State Potato Growers
New York Apple Association, Inc.
New York State Vegetable Growers Association
North Carolina Potato Association
North Carolina Vegetable Growers Association
North Carolina Watermelon Association
Ohio Apples Marketing Association
Ohio Produce Growers Marketing Association
Fruit Growers Marketing Association
Pennsylvania Co-operative Potato Growers
South Carolina Watermelon Association
Texas Citrus Mutual

Texas International Produce Association
Texas Watermelon Association
Washington State Potato Commission
Washington State Tree Fruit Association
Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Assn., Inc.