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April 2, 2020

Dear Minister,

The Manitoba Nursery Landscape Association, MBNLA, is a provincial non-profit organization dedicated to advancing the interests of horticulture and landscape professionals and upholding the highest standards of the nursery and landscape industry.

MBNLA is requesting clarity on whether greenhouse growers, nursery operators and retail garden centers are going to be granted essential service status by the province of Manitoba. Some sectors of our member businesses are clearly identified in this order such as; construction, lawn care and arboriculture. What is not entirely clear to our members is where the greenhouse, nursery and retail garden center sectors fall within this order. We will fully comply with the current order to limit sales to delivery and curbside pick-up until April 15 as this is not our peak sales season yet. We would request the essential business classification to be applied to the retail garden centre sector for May 1, 2020 or sooner.

The survival of retail nursery operations and the continuing employment of their workers depends on these businesses being allowed to continue operating during this crisis. We ask that our locally-owned independent retail greenhouses, garden centres and nurseries be included with home supply, hardware, and big-box stores, and that our member businesses would fall within the retail exemption for any future mandated closures. Garden center products are unique in their production and formats that do not lend themselves easily to online sales. British Columbia, Quebec, and Saskatchewan have identified Garden Centres and Nurseries as essential businesses.

With a predominantly seasonal staff in Manitoba, we can provide additional employment opportunities to allow for the extra staffing potentially required to mitigate social distancing requirements such as specified staff for deliveries and curbside pickup, which is not normally a staffing requirement. The ability to continue to employ Manitobans reduces the demand on government subsidies for individuals.

For the association's growers, greenhouses, retail operators, the spring season is the most critical time of the entire year. Thousands of trucks ship the bulk of the year's orders to customers across the province during this small window. It is a make or break time. For most wholesale growers, the local Manitoba market is key, and with no destination for their perishable product, which is already in live production, the business losses would be devastating. Generally, plants sold after June 30 only recover 10% of what that plant would be worth during peak sales period.

Furthermore, they are an important component of the Manitoba Economy.

The 2018 MANITOBA ECONOMIC IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT HORTICULTURAL PRODUCTION conducted by the Manitoba Bureau of Statistics (MBS) estimates current Manitoba horticultural production to include about **5,000** acres of fruit and vegetables, **2,900** acres of sod, **1,600** acres of other nursery products, (9,500 total acres of field horticulture) and **3.18 million square feet of greenhouses**.

The total impact to Manitoba GDP at market prices is estimated at **\$80 million** per year. This is the net monetary impact to the provincial economy. For each \$1.00 in operating expenditures the GDP impact is estimated at \$1.00, while for each \$1.00 in output the GDP impact is \$0.80. The total impact to Manitoba labour income (which is included in the above GDP figure) is estimated at **\$50 million** per year.

We do not feel that we are above any other industry, but we can provide products and services to the population that may be largely confined to their residences for an extended period of time. We are able to provide an investment in property, personal exercise, and mental health. Food security, support of the value chain, health benefits and the therapeutic nature of plants point to an industry that will be sadly needed, but highly valued during these difficult times. It is anticipated that the food supply chain will be compromised this year due to transportation limitations during the Covid Crisis in North America. As providers of seeds and food plants, garden centres can help alleviate strains on the food supply chain. It has been reported in other countries where spring has already arrived that there is a resurgence in Victory Gardens, similar to what occurred during World War II.

With peak season beginning May1, each business would have the time and opportunity to collaborate and implement the necessary measures that comply fully with safety protocols outlined by government health officials. MBNLA can provide resources from other provinces and countries that have already established social distancing protocols for use by the unique retail horticulture sector. Some inherent conditions already benefit the retail environment that garden centres operate within. For example, garden centre products are not stacked, rather they are one layer over vast square footage areas lending itself to low density social distancing. Garden Centres also have superior ventilation over stores with significant cubic feet per minute of air moving, and some hardy products like trees and shrubs are displayed in outdoor sales yards.

Allowing these businesses to operate effectively at this time of year is their only chance for survival.

For further information contact MBNLA Garden Centre Chair Jordan Hiebert at 204-996-3800, or MBNLA Executive Director Rob Officer at 204-471-4503.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

Guy Dowhy, President

Manitoba Nursery Landscape Association