



STATE OF MISSISSIPPI  
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND COMMERCE

ANDY GIPSON  
COMMISSIONER

April 2, 2020

Guidance from Commissioner Andy Gipson  
for the Agriculture and Commerce Sector and Workers in Mississippi  
on Activity and Travel During "Shelter in Place"

Governor Tate Reeves signed Executive Order Number 1466 on April 1, 2020 which orders and directs a statewide "Shelter in Place" from 5:00 p.m. on Friday, April 3, 2020 until 8:00 a.m. on Monday, April 20, 2020 to slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus in Mississippi and to manage needed healthcare and emergency management resources. This order requires all individuals residing in Mississippi to remain at home or their place of residence and closes certain businesses and public amenities.

The Order provides exceptions. Mississippians may still obtain food, services or supplies for themselves or their family and can deliver such supplies to others. Individuals may still perform tasks necessary to the health and safety of themselves, their family, or their animals including seeking medical treatment. You can still engage in outdoor activity and recreation if it adheres to social distancing guidelines.

**You can also work and travel for work if that work is an essential business or operation. Agriculture and related industries are considered "essential" under Executive Order Number 1463 signed by Governor Reeves on March 24, 2020.**

Agriculture and the industries that support agriculture are necessary for the food supply chain. Without agriculture Mississippi would not have the food, fiber, fuel and shelter necessary to maintain public health and safety.

**Agriculture businesses and workers have the authority under the Governor's orders to remain open, operate and perform work as necessary to provide their essential services; this includes travel. County and municipal authorities may not impose restrictions that prevent essential business, including agriculture, from operating at such level necessary to provide their essential services and functions; this includes travel.**

The Mississippi Department of Agriculture's Ag Theft Bureau will be contacting local law enforcement officers to communicate that agriculture and related industries are essential businesses and should be permitted to operate and travel. If you encounter law enforcement who restrict these operations or travel, **stay calm and be respectful** of these men and women who are seeking to keep us all safe in this dangerous time. Explain that your role is essential service. Show them this letter. If they persist, **follow the direction of law enforcement**. If they give you a citation, take it and that can be addressed later. You can contact my office or agricultural or commerce related associations of which you are a member and we help clear it up.

But let me be clear. This virus is dangerous and extremely contagious. **If you can stay home, you should. If you can limit your travel, you should. You should take every necessary step to protect yourself, your family and your neighbors.** Being designated as essential workforce is not a license to cruise or ignore guidance from the CDC or the Mississippi Department of Health.

For example, if you need supplies to continue to operate your farm, you have the authority to go to an agricultural supply store which has the authority to be open. While traveling and while at the store, you are still required to follow social distancing guidelines. On the other hand, while a farmer is essential workforce and the farm store is an essential business, that farmer would not have the authority to go to that store for a cup of coffee and to visit with people.

To further advise you and others, the following are included as “Essential Business of Operation” under order from the Governor:

*Agriculture and farms including food cultivation, livestock, cattle, poultry and seafood operations, livestock auctions, feedlots, dealers and brokers of livestock, livestock transporters, farmer’s markets, feed stores, repair of agriculture equipment, gas, diesel and petroleum suppliers, aquaculture, horticulture, chemicals including pesticides, herbicides and fertilizer, producers and distributors, forest product businesses, including those involved in forestry operations, logging, manufacture of lumber and paper products, meat processing facilities, rendering facilities and transporters, feed processing facilities, veterinary services;*

Without listing all the essential businesses in the Order, here are a few more that relate to agriculture and Mississippi’s food and supply chain:

*Essential infrastructure including...utility poles and components, fuel and transmission petroleum producers, suppliers and distributors, supply chain companies...flood control...aviation...automotive sales and repair, vehicle rental services...transportation infrastructure...Manufacturing including food processing and production...food additives...chemical products...fuel and petroleum exploration and production, lubricants, greases and engine oils...sanitary and cleaning products...products used by any other Essential Business or Operation [including agriculture]...Essential retail including all supermarket, food and beverage stores, food providers, convenience stores, pharmacies, hardware and building materials, gas stations, restaurants [with specific limitations on restaurants]...automotive sales and repair...Construction and construction related services including building and construction, lumber, building materials and hardware, electricians, plumbers, exterminators, cleaning and janitorial, HVACR and water heating industry, painting, moving and relocating services, and other skilled trades, and other related construction firms and professionals for maintaining essential infrastructure...*

Finally, the Governor’s order also incorporates categories of workers and related industries identified by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) in its “Memorandum on Identification of Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers During CoVID-19 Response.”

That guidance from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security includes the following:

#### *FOOD AND AGRICULTURE*

- *Workers supporting groceries, pharmacies, convenience stores, and other retail (including unattended and vending) that sells human food, animal/pet food and pet supply, and beverage products, including retail customer support service and information technology support staff necessary for online orders, pickup and delivery.*
- *Restaurant carry-out and quick serve food operations, including dark kitchen and food prep centers, and carryout and delivery food employees.*
- *Food manufacturer employees and their supplier employees—to include those employed in food ingredient production and processing 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.*
- *Farmers, farm workers, and agribusiness support services to include those employed in auction and sales: grain and oilseed handling, processing and distribution; 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 and for export.*
- *Farmers, farm workers, support service workers, and their supplier employees to include those engaged in producing and harvesting field crops; commodity inspection; fuel ethanol facilities; biodiesel and renewable diesel facilities; storage facilities; and other agricultural inputs.*
- *Employees and firms supporting the distribution of food, feed, and beverage and ingredients used in these products, including warehouse workers, vendor- managed inventory controllers and blockchain managers.*
- *Workers supporting the sanitation and pest control of all food manufacturing processes and operations from wholesale to retail.*
- *Employees in cafeterias used to feed employees, particularly employee populations sheltered against COVID-19.*
- *Workers in animal diagnostic and food testing laboratories in private industries and in institutions of higher education.*
- *Government, private, and non-governmental organizations' workers essential for food assistance programs (including school lunch programs) and government payments.*
- *Employees of companies engaged in the production, storage, transport, and distribution of chemicals, medicines, vaccines, and other substances used by the food and agriculture industry, including seeds, pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, minerals, enrichments, and other agricultural production aids.*
- *Animal agriculture workers to include those employed in veterinary health (including those involved in supporting emergency veterinary or livestock services); raising of animals for food; animal production operations; livestock markets; slaughter and packing plants, manufacturers, renderers, and associated regulatory and government workforce.*
- *Transportation supporting animal agricultural industries, including movement of animal medical and reproductive supplies and materials, animal vaccines, animal drugs, feed ingredients, feed, and bedding, live animals, animal by-products, and deceased animals for disposal.*
- *Workers who support sawmills and the manufacture and distribution of fiber and forest products, including, but not limited to timber, paper, and other wood and fiber products.*
- *Employees engaged in the manufacture and maintenance of equipment and other infrastructure necessary for agricultural production and distribution.*

Even though our offices are currently closed to the public, as always, you can reach us by phone at 601-359-1100. The voice mail will be monitored and delivered to the appropriate person for response. You can continue to keep up with some of the actions being taken by MDAC on the Department's COVID-19 Update page <https://www.mdac.ms.gov/covid19/> online.