



Missouri Governor — Michael L. Parson
Office of Communications

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 25, 2020

Governor Parson Highlights Importance of Food and Agriculture Industry to Missouri's COVID-19 Response Efforts

(JEFFERSON CITY, MO) – In today's press briefing, Governor Parson assured Missourians that the state's food supply remains strong and emphasized the important role of the food and agriculture industry in Missouri's COVID-19 response efforts.

Missouri Agriculture Meeting the Demands of Food Production and Supply

"Missouri's food supply is as strong as the men and women who drive our trucks and tractors," **Governor Parson** said. "Farmers, ranchers and agribusinesses are critical pieces of our society at all times, especially right now. I want every worker and employer involved in the food industry to know that your work has never been more important."

Agriculture plays a vital role in taking care of citizens' most basic needs during a public health emergency, and the Missouri Department of Agriculture (MDA) has been working closely with its partners to maintain the state's strong food supply chain.

In coordination with MDA and the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS), Governor Parson approved a request from DHSS Director Dr. Randall Williams to create a consistent directive across local governments for any individual or business that is part of the food supply chain.

Farmers, ranchers, agriculture businesses, and grocery stores are encouraged to continue essential business functions to feed Missouri citizens. This guidance supports the list published last week by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security identifying the food and agriculture industry as critical infrastructure during the COVID-19 response.

Additionally, by signing Executive Order 20-04 last week, Governor Parson extended the hours commercial drivers can operate on Missouri roadways in order to deliver essential supplies.

The Governor's Office also worked with the Missouri Department of Transportation to allow for heavier-than-normal truckloads of supplies and equipment to travel on Missouri highways in the direct effort to prevent, contain, mitigate, and treat the effects of the COVID-19 virus. This includes shipments of livestock and poultry.

Supporting Missouri Businesses and Workers

Governor Parson also outlined steps being taken by the Missouri Department of Labor and Industrial Relations (DOLIR) and the Missouri Department of Economic Development (DED) to assist with the state's COVID-19 response.

To assist businesses and workers impacted by the public health crisis, DOLIR is adjusting the administration of the state's unemployment insurance program.

The following flexibility measures will be temporarily implemented:

- Relax the work search requirement for COVID-19 related claims
- Waive waiting week for unemployment insurance claims filed due to COVID-19, decreasing processing time
-
- **Waive charging COVID-19 related claims on employers' unemployment insurance accounts, helping employers avoid negative impact on their payroll tax rate**

These measures will reduce the process time of claims while still maintaining the due process requirements for both employers and workers. Employers are still notified that a claim has been filed, and they have the opportunity to protest the reason for the claim. Workers and businesses can find more information and file a claim at <http://www.labor.mo.gov>.

DED is also taking action during the COVID-19 crisis. In addition to Missouri's approval for assistance through the U.S. Small Business Administration's Economic Injury Disaster Loan program, DED has been actively reaching out to business leaders across the state to see how they can assist during this challenging time.

DED is also exploring other creative ways to contribute to Missouri's COVID-19 response efforts, such as repurposing Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds.

Together, DED, the Missouri State Emergency Management Agency, the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, and the Office of Administration partnered with the Cole County Commission and Missouri Association of Councils of Government to provide CDBG funds to purchase 125 ventilators to aid in the statewide response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

\$2.8 million in CDBG funding will be used for the purchase and distribution of the ventilators. The Missouri Department of Transportation will be distributing the ventilators based on need. The goal is to provide hospitals and first responders with the necessary equipment to perform life-saving measures.

To view Governor Parson's remarks from today's press briefing, please see attachment. All pictures from today's press briefing are available on [Governor Parson's Flickr page](#).