

House of Representatives
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG

April 17, 2020

Office of the Governor
508 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Wolf,

We appreciate the efforts of your Administration to provide assistance to keep food available to all Pennsylvanians. However, we are requesting that you not rely solely on the USDA and its efforts to assist in securing the reliability and sustainability of our food supply. We believe you can take some additional steps to keep Pennsylvania self-sufficient and a leader in food production.

While we know that plenty of food is being produced at the farm level, we have serious and urgent concerns about the availability of the workforce trained and capable of processing the food, and the availability of necessary packaging in sizes for consumer use. These limitations seem to be contributing to milk dumping, poultry depopulation, allowing vegetables to rot in the fields, and other types of unfortunate raw food waste.

Our food processing workforce needs immediate reassurance that their workplace is safe to go to work, and employers need to be provided with the tools to protect their workforce from COVID – 19. Unfortunately, your recent order for all employees to wear masks is not practical in many agribusiness and food processing settings. However, there are other procedures that can be implemented which we believe are critical to protect employees, encourage them to go to work, and provide the resources they need to get food to the grocery stores, charitable food assistance outlets and ultimately, to the consumer. We are recommending immediate action and consideration of the following:

1. Prioritize and provide for rapid Abbott tests for food processing employees that an employer can administer before an employee enters a premise. Alternatively, until those tests and the reagent supply become more widely available, implement a plan to expedite the turnaround of test results for food processing employees. If there is a method for a food processing worker to be easily identified when they report for a test, and that notation causes their test to be marked urgent, that would be a tremendous help to keeping this critical workforce at work. The current 3-5 day turnaround is simply unacceptable for this population.
2. Work with employers to be aggressive about monitoring the health of their workforce. Is it possible for the Department of Agriculture's food sanitarians to help administer daily infrared temperature evaluations of every employee entering a premise? Alternatively, is there a supply of infrared temperature devices that could be provided to industry? Is there a way to connect unemployed nurses with food processing employers to help monitor health and administer testing?
3. Connect food processors with reliable outlets for PPE. Finding sources of supply and actually getting PPE delivered in a timely manner remain challenging for this critical, life-sustaining industry.
4. Communicate frequently with industry to assess current production capacity rates and weekly estimated projection of production capacity rates from our major food processing facilities so we can all better understand and manage expectations of food supply for the public.

5. Our food processors are also facing a lack of necessary supplies to package product that previously made up over 50% of their business for restaurant and institutional use. They need smaller, consumer-sized packaging resources, such as smaller cans and cartons. We ask that you identify the capacity for increased production of these much-needed items and reach out to the food packaging supply manufacturing community to invite them to use the newly created Pennsylvania Manufacturing Call to Action Portal.

6. Likewise, many of our food processors may be able to retool their processing from institutional-size portions to consumer/retail-size quantities. We know there may be a significant cost involved in that transition, but we ask that you reach out and invite them to use the PA Manufacturing Call to Action Portal.

We have identified that there are roughly 10,000 employees in just the major poultry, pork and beef harvesting plants in Pennsylvania. There are thousands more in the egg, dairy and vegetable processing facilities. Keeping these employees healthy and working is of paramount importance to keeping our food supply chain intact. And asking manufacturers to "think outside of the box" to retool both food product and food product packaging materials in consumer sizes will be of utmost importance to keeping our grocery store shelves and food pantries stocked.

We appreciate your prompt attention to these urgent matters.

Sincerely,



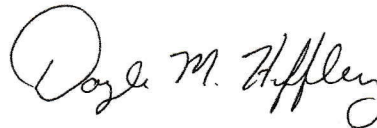
Martin Causer, Chairman
Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee



Bryan Cutler
Majority Leader



Martina White
State Representative



Doyle Heffley
State Representative