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Honourable Jason Kenney  
Premier. President of Executive Council  
Office of the Premier  
307 Legislature Building  
10800 - 97 Avenue  
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

(sent via email)

Dear Premier,

I am writing on behalf of the landscape horticulture and gardening industry in Alberta. This industry provides a diverse group of products and services that are all part of the same value chain. Collectively we account for over \$2 billion in economic impact across approximately 1000 companies, employing 18,000 Albertans. We are writing pre-emptively to ask for consideration as essential business status as has been granted at the time of writing in Ontario as well as in 12 US states for the same business services.

There is no good time for a global health pandemic. Unfortunately for the association's growers, greenhouses, retail operators, and landscape service providers (unlike other agricultural sectors), 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 Alberta market is key, and with no destination for their perishable product, the business losses would be devastating. Simply put, this is a critical time for the economic well-being of the industry unless the value-chain is able to be linked there will be little to no need for the crops grown.

Spring is a key time for retail nursery/greenhouse/garden centres. The retail component of the nursery industry is critical to the success of our sector as a whole, and for our retail community. Sales are at a peak as spring turns into summer. For the vast majority of Landscape Alberta's membership, sales for the year typically come from the eight-week time frame in mid-April to mid-June. Therefore, 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 home supply and hardware stores, including nursery garden centers and big-box stores, fall within the retail exemption for any future mandated closures.

Albertans are resilient and resourceful in the face of adversity when provided the opportunity to produce their own food and manage any shortage in the supply chain. Tens of thousands of Albertans already engage in food production at home, and more are sure to follow as the COVID-19 crisis evolves.

Many of the products carried by garden retailers are agricultural, like seeds and edible bedding plants. They also provide the necessary tools and supplies for plants to grow. Together they are essential in contributing to maintaining a healthy living environment and a potentially an asset in the food chain. In many communities, the garden retailer may be the only outlet where consumers have access to essential supplies for growing, gardening, maintaining or repairing their residences.

For the following reasons, the Board of Director's for Landscape Alberta has suggested why landscape services should be deemed "essential.":

- Landscape service providers are protectors of public health by performing essential care to lawns and green spaces to reduce the transmission of dangerous and deadly diseases through pests like mosquitoes, ticks, and fleas (known vectors for disease transmission). Any significant disease transmission would add stress to the already burdened health care system.
- Landscape service providers protect municipal, commercial, and residential infrastructure and property. As well as maintain greenspaces that could otherwise jeopardize public safety. Neglected fields and green spaces increase the chance of injuries. Crime rates are increased in areas where green spaces are not maintained. Tree removal is also a critical function of our industry to avoid damaging homes and their families. Snow removal is also an activity many landscape service providers perform and should be considered essential in terms of public safety.

Through this difficult time, Albertans are being told to focus on positive physical and mental health routines. Social isolation and lack of physical activity can lead to a variety of health issues which are sure to occur the longer isolation is required. Gardening is the number one leisure activity in Canada. By maintaining access to home gardening and public green spaces (parks and trails) we can help ensure the physical and mental health of all Albertans (while helping people follow social distancing protocols).

Lastly, our industry is taking aggressive steps within our organization to assist members to stop the transmission of COVID-19 through vigilant communication and education. Because our industry primarily functions outdoors, this greatly reduces the contact with other individuals. Within the industry, strong policies are being put in place to maintain social distancing and increased sanitization in line with Alberta Health Services protocols for both employees and clients. Other examples include, garden retailers are imposing customer limits (or by appointment), parking lot pick up orders, and other best practices. Agricultural operations (farms) are restricting access to their sites as well as changing payment options.

We are all in this together, and the landscape horticulture industry stands with our public officials to stop the rapid transmission of COVID-19 while also continuing to perform those essential functions that are necessary within our communities throughout Alberta. For the reasons listed above I hope you will find that we are both essential and low risk. I request on behalf of the landscape horticulture industry that we be considered for essential status if actions are taken to limit business operations.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joel Beatson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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CC:

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