March 19, 2020

Dear Federal, State and Local Officials:

As the country mobilizes to meet the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis, the International Warehouse Logistics Association (IWLA) and the Global Cold Chain Alliance (GCCA) request assistance clarifying that third-party warehouses and distribution centers storing, handling and transporting food (for human and animal consumption) be deemed part of the critical infrastructure and exempt from the gathering and curfew bans that are starting to take effect.

Our members are warehouse-based third-party logistics providers (3PLs) who are integral to transporting, storing and distributing food products from factories and ports to grocery shelves. 95% of the food produced and manufactured in or imported into the United States goes through third-party warehouses and distribution centers before it reaches American consumers.

The Food Supply Chain

• Presidential Policy Directive 21 (PPD-21) designates the food and agriculture sector as a critical infrastructure sector whose assets, systems, and networks are considered so vital that their incapacitation or destruction would have a debilitating effect on security, national economic security, national public health, or safety.
• The President’s Coronavirus Guidance published on March 16, 2020 instructs employees of Critical Infrastructure Industries, such as the food and agriculture sector, to maintain normal work patterns during the global coronavirus outbreak.
• Food warehousing and distribution center facilities are covered by PPD-21 and the President’s Guidance.

We Ask the Following:

• Essential Designation: To continue providing a safe and reliable food supply, we are asking for clear, unambiguous classification as “essential businesses and services” to allow our employees to leave their residences and come to work as needed to perform job functions and keep the food supply stable for the American people, even if facilities are located in quarantined or lockdown areas. Warehouse workers must have access to food distribution facilities, even if that requires them to pass through, or into quarantined areas. This also includes the transportation providers moving product into and out of our facilities.
• Testing: Supporting a robust public health response, including priority access to coronavirus test kits for food warehouse facilities to ensure a healthy workforce, is available to handle food products as it moves through the supply chain.
• **Supplies:** Granting priority access to cleaning and sanitation supplies and other tools should we experience an outbreak and need to quickly restore operations.

• **Infrastructure:** Keeping ports and transportation networks open to retain Americans’ access to international products – priority access in ports for food and food-related products.

We all know that maintaining sufficient food supplies in our communities is vital. Grocery stores and other retail food facilities must be able to depend on a steady and dependable flow of food to fill their empty shelves. Yet, this can only happen if the food supply chain is functioning smoothly without unnecessary impediments. That is why IWLA and GCCA urge you to implement the above policy initiatives.

IWLA and GCCA stand ready to work with federal and state officials to make sure the food supply chain can meet the demands of this unprecedented crisis.

Sincerely,

Steve W. DeHaan, CAE
President and CEO
IWLA
Megan Costello
Interim President & CEO
GCCA

Who We Are?

GCCA: Our network of 777 cold storage warehouses and transportation hubs across the country serve as the backbone of the food supply chain – in other words, we are largely responsible for our food’s journey from the points of production and processing to consumers’ hands. Our members employ 62,000 people in the US and serve 6,000 food manufacturers and retail customers. 3PL cold storage facilities bring milk, eggs, chicken, fish, pork, beef, fruits, vegetables, and more to grocery stores, restaurants, and critically important bodies like hospitals, military bases, and government programs including the National School Lunch program and USDA Nutrition Assistance Programs such as SNAP and WIC.

IWLA: Many members operate food-grade warehouse facilities for the storage, handling, and distribution of food products for manufacturers, processors, distributors and retailers. 380 warehouse companies have 3,000 locations throughout the US and Canada. They employ 23,000 people and they serve 15,000 customers. Food products in these warehouses may be finished products packaged for the consumer or packaged ingredients intended for delivery to another food production facility. Food products are generally stored in sealed packages, such as cartons, drums, or totes -- often in pallet-sized increments.