

Issues Discussed on the 3/20/20 Call with Executive Council Officers and Board Chairs & Vice Chairs

IDFA Update

- Please keep checking the coronavirus page on our website for new information.
- More states are issuing “shelter in place” orders. Even though the federal government has designated food and agriculture as an essential infrastructure, some states are not honoring that designation. We have developed a self-certification letter that may help.
- We have been advocating at USDA and on Capitol Hill for more flexibility in the WIC program (e.g., our milk & yogurt Child Nutrition Reauthorization priorities)
- We have been working with the FDA on prioritizing inspections and extending the industry’s ability to use current packaging supplies for an additional period of time.
- We have also been in contact with our counterparts in the European Union.
- We are sending our coronavirus information out to both members and non-members.
- We will organize calls with each of the segment boards to provide an opportunity for those members to share best practices and to provide feedback on our efforts. We will also organize weekly calls for this group (every Wednesday at 6 pm) as well on an as-needed basis.

State Shelter in Place Requirements

- In addition to allowing plant workers to come to the plant, we also need to make sure that other critical employees not on the line can get to their offices at headquarters or in a different location from the plant to keep plants up and running.
- Pro-active outreach to local authorities, urging them to work with us on transportation and access issues may be a good idea.
- The shut-down of restaurant dining rooms in some areas has further hurt companies that rely primarily on food service customers.

Retailer Issues

- Panic-buying and more in-home consumption are still driving high demand at grocery stores.
- With transportation delays and panic-buying, some retailers are urging suppliers to winnow down the number of SKUs which is also helpful for manufacturers who are trying to operate more efficiently with fewer employees. Customers are more open to having fewer in-store options during this time period.
- Retailers are also relaxing some of their “on time delivery” requirements which has helped keep the supply chain functioning. Companies are also working with retailers to accept food service sizes in stores. Cary Frye noted that there are labeling requirements for some of these products and that exemptions will be required. We hope to hear back from FDA on this topic on Monday.

Farm Issues

- In California, employees are still showing up to work on the farms and in the plants. The “feeding the world” message seems to be working and is driving a lot of beneficial teamwork.

Transportation Issues

- Vulnerability of an aging truck driver population to COVID-19 could present a problem at some point. Michael Dykes noted that we have been working on this issue and have raised it with policymakers.
- Transportation efficiency could also suffer over time. If trucks can't/won't access plants, that could cause major logistical problems in the future.
- Some ports have been closed, but some may also be close to re-opening (Houston).
- Need to keep a close eye on how the partial border closure with Mexico is implemented.
- Some drivers are reluctant to cross the border into Canada or Mexico because of a worry that they might not be allowed to return to the U.S.

Employee Issues

- Working at home has caused employee stress levels to increase. One way to help may be for company leaders to communicate business information broadly so that all employees feel part of the enterprise.
- Better guidance from CDC/FDA on employee health questions would be helpful. Joe Scimeca and Michael Dykes reported that FDA has agreed to address this issue and we are awaiting enhanced guidance materials. One company noted that they have been conducting a series of town hall meetings for employees to explain how employee health issues will be addressed by the company.
- Access to hairnets, masks and gloves is going to be a priority for our industry. Michael Dykes noted that we are talking to the White House about this issue to make sure they understand it is an important issue for our industry as well as for the medical and healthcare industry.
 - Should our employees have priority access to coronavirus tests? If they can't get tested, it causes employee anxiety and could lead to greater absenteeism in plants.
- Retailer members have started to form "strategic partnerships" with industries that have been negatively affected to utilize their transportation and employee assets. The focus is on establishing strategic alliances as opposed to one-off hires. Companies are also starting to do this in their communities, with training being a big focus area given the likelihood that employee absenteeism at plants is likely to become a bigger problem in the future.
- Drug tests for employees are not being processed at the present time at the request of certain health care facilities. Some companies are temporarily waiving their testing requirements.
- Companies are also exploring temporary pay raises for manufacturing and retail workers.