



Michael Watson
SECRETARY OF STATE



COVID-19 Tips, Resources and Relief Efforts

Thursday, May 7, 2020



Limited Loans for Agricultural Small Businesses

Farms and other agricultural employers can start applying for grants and low-interest, long-term loans through the Small Business Administration's Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) program. The agency said it would begin accepting new EIDL applications "on a limited basis only, in order to provide unprecedented relief to U.S. agricultural businesses."

SBA's EIDL portal reopened earlier this week as a result of funding authorized by Congress through the Paycheck Protection Program and Healthcare Enhancement Act. The legislation included \$50 billion for the EIDL program and \$10 billion for the EIDL Advance program. Agricultural small businesses with less than 500 employees are eligible for grants of up to \$10,000 under the EIDL Advance program and loans up to \$2 million under the EIDL program.

For agricultural businesses that submitted an EIDL loan application through the streamlined application portal prior to the legislative change, SBA will move forward and process these applications without the need for re-applying. All other EIDL loan applications that were submitted before the portal stopped accepting new applications on April 15 will be processed on a first-in, first-out basis.

[Click here to apply for an EIDL loan.](#)

Stronger Food Supply Chain in MS

Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce, Andy Gipson, outlined steps being taken by the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce to strengthen the state's food supply chain in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The initiatives expand farm-to-table efforts and increase food security and the availability of Mississippi food for Mississippians.



- **Initiative 1:** Commissioner Gipson signed an emergency rule to expand the custom slaughter exemption by increasing the allowed number of shares sold per animal. The 120-day emergency rule will expire; however, the Department will file a regular rule change to make this a permanent rule. Commissioner Gipson says this action will provide additional options for both farmers and consumers.
- **Initiative 2:** The launch of the Mississippi Farm Marketplace, an online marketing portal that gives farmers a place to list commodities they have for

sale, while providing consumers a location to easily source local products. A variety of commodities can be listed including produce, meats, dairy products, honey, live animals for custom slaughter, eggs, aquaculture, seafood, and horticulture products. In addition, the portal contains a listing of on-farm jobs available.

- [Click here to access the portal.](#)
- **Initiative 3:** Commissioner Gipson discussed the need to expand meat processing capacity in the state as some producers are unable to get meat processed because many processing facilities are at capacity. He invited existing meat processors to submit applications to the Mississippi Land, Water, and Timber Resources Program to upgrade their facilities to federally inspected status, or expand their facilities for additional processing capacity.

[Click here to view the full press conference regarding these initiatives.](#)

Mental Health Tips



The Mississippi Department of Mental Health (DMH) is encouraging Mississippians to learn about how they can cope with the stress and anxiety that is a natural response to the difficulties we are facing during the national pandemic. Everyone reacts differently in a time of crisis, but there are a handful of coping mechanisms we all should try to keep in mind. DMH recommends the following mental health tips:

- Avoid excessive exposure to media coverage of COVID-19.
- Take care of your physical health by eating well and getting exercise.
- Keep a sense of hope and positivity with your thoughts and interactions.
- Even when practicing social distancing, you can connect with others. Make time to have phone calls or video chats with your friends and loved ones.

The DMH Helpline (1-877-210-8513) will remain staffed at all times during the pandemic and will be available to direct people to appropriate supports and services.

[Click here for more mental health tips.](#)

A Virtual Salute to Mississippi Seniors

Students who were preparing to graduate this spring are feeling a range of emotions after their long-awaited, in-person commencement ceremonies were either altered, postponed, or canceled due to coronavirus-related concerns. Secretary Watson delivered a virtual commencement address via Facebook Live on Monday to honor graduating seniors all across our state. The online address is a part of Salute to Seniors, the Secretary of State's Office's digital celebration for the Class of 2020. We may be physically distant, but there are still plenty of ways we all can come together to help ease the hurt and pain our students are feeling during this time.



[Click here to view Secretary Watson's virtual commencement address.](#)

Public Assistance for Houses of Worship/Nonprofits

The advertisement is a composite image. The top left shows the interior of a church with people seated in pews. The top right is a dark blue box with white text: "HOUSES OF WORSHIP AND NONPROFITS MAY BE ELIGIBLE FOR PUBLIC ASSISTANCE DUE TO COVID-19". The bottom left is a tan box with black text: "ELIGIBLE ASSISTANCE INCLUDES: DISINFECTION OF PUBLIC FACILITIES" and "*PUBLIC ASSISTANCE DOES NOT COVER LOSS OF REVENUE*". The bottom center shows a person in a white "VOLUNTEER" shirt handling supplies. The bottom right is a tan box with black text: "TO APPLY VISIT: www.grantee.fema.gov" and "CURRENTLY, THERE IS NO DEADLINE TO APPLY", with the FEMA logo below.

[Click here to apply.](#)

Executive Orders

[Executive Order 1478](#)

Executive Order 1478 lays out strict social distancing guidelines to begin the process of slowly and safely reopening restaurants and allowing outdoor recreation.

[Executive Order 1477](#)

Executive Order 1477 establishes a statewide Safer at Home order for Mississippi.

[Executive Order 1476](#)

Executive Order 1476 implements school closures for the rest of the academic year.

[Executive Order 1474](#)

Executive Order 1474 delays the expiration of driver's licenses, learner's permits, intermediate licenses, firearm permits and security guard permits.

[Click here to view all Executive Orders.](#)

Emergency Contact Information

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[Mississippi State Department of Health](#)

(877) 978-6453

[Mississippi Emergency Management Agency](#)

(601) 933-6362

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

(800) 232-4636

[Mississippi Department of Employment Security](#)

(601) 855-3133

1-888-844-3577 (*toll-free*)

1-888-772-0061 (*toll-free*)