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Date: March 26, 2020

To: NJFC Members

From: Linda Doherty, President

Re: NJFC Member COVID-19 Update

We know it has been a trying time for members and we continue our efforts to keep the NJFC membership informed and serve as a liaison with the Governor's Office and our government partners. Below is a brief update on issues members will want to know.

SNAP – EMERGENCY ALLOCATION

The State will disburse an Emergency Allotment of SNAP benefits this Sunday, March 29, to recipients who did not receive the maximum amount for the month of March. The disbursement is expected to be a total of \$35 million, and affects about 63% percent of SNAP households, which is 205,000 households. Then during the first five days of the month (typical benefits days), all recipients will receive a full maximum disbursement of SNAP benefits on their scheduled benefit day. No further allocation of benefits is scheduled for later in April. Again, the April disbursement is another \$35 million in SNAP dollars.

The State will NOT have the time to notify recipients and will depend on social media messaging and local agency communications. As with the government shutdown last year, State officials hope NJFC members can help share the information.

There is an expectation that more NJ residents will become eligible for SNAP based on the current economic conditions, but new cases could take at least 30 days to process, and we will keep members apprised.

As the federal stimulus package is on the verge of final approval, there could be additional SNAP funding so we will inform members when we have that information.

WIC

As we reported earlier, a federal waiver has been approved to allow for WIC product substitutions on a variety of products. You can go to the NJFC website www.njfoodcouncil.com to find the documentation if you don't have handy the copy we sent to members over the weekend. NJFC had requested this waiver given the supply chain pressures and the difficulty in obtaining certain products. We are also expecting another waiver to relax the minimum stocking requirements for retailers and we will inform members once that is formally announced.

Childcare

On Wednesday, Governor Murphy signed [Executive Order 110](#), directing all childcare centers in the State to certify by March 27 that they will solely serve as emergency child care centers for the children of essential workers, or they must close by April 1. EO 110 reads, in part, "For purposes of this Order, "essential persons" shall include, but not be limited to.. "Certain critical workers, as defined by the Commissioner of DCF, **at essential retail businesses**, as defined in Executive Order No. 107 (2020) and subsequent Administrative Orders. The Commissioner of DCF, in consultation with the State Director of Emergency Management, shall have the discretion to make additions, amendments, clarifications, exceptions, and exclusions to this list taking into account both demonstrated need and the capacity of Emergency Child Care Centers." As you know, [Executive Order 107](#) includes food retailers in its list of essential retail businesses, and NJFC continues to relay to the Governor's office the importance of child care access in enabling our workers to continue to serve their communities during this crisis.

Tolls

The New Jersey Turnpike Authority has suspended cash collections at all toll locations on the New Jersey Turnpike and Garden State Parkway as of 10:00 p.m. on March 24th as a precaution against the spread of COVID-19. All tolls are now being collected electronically.

The process will remain the same for drivers with E-ZPass tags in their vehicles. The equipment reads the E-ZPass tag, and the cost of the toll is deducted from the account. For drivers without E-ZPass, the equipment in the lane captures a photograph of the license plate and an invoice for the cost of the toll will be mailed to the registered owner, billed at the cash toll rate, with no additional administrative fees.

On a related note, NJFC will be commenting on the NJ Turnpike Authority's proposed 2020 Capital Improvement Plan, which includes significant toll increases on the Parkway and Turnpike. We have requested that the Governor's Office delay consideration of the toll increases until after the crisis ends.

Job Openings

As you may know, NJFC has been working in conjunction with the Governor's Office and the NJ Restaurant & Hospitality Association to match job seekers who have been displaced with job openings in our member stores. Many members need additional staff during this time. NJFC has its own listing for our members to utilize, and NJEDA has created a [jobs portal](#) populated with openings in the key industries which are seeking additional employees.

Criminal Behavior

Unfortunately, there have been disturbing reports of individuals sneezing or coughing on associates or other customers in grocery stores, or coughing or sneezing on food, and saying they have coronavirus. Law enforcement is taking this very seriously and have deemed these acts criminal, and in some cases, have charged the alleged offenders with terrorism.

Disposable Bags

Many members have reached out to NJFC to express concerns about existing municipal ordinances which restrict the use of single-use plastic and/or paper bags while our industry is on the front lines of this public health crisis, which has resulted in unprecedented demands on the food supply chain. Food retailers are working with their suppliers to address the shortages resulting from a significant influx of customers buying additional products, which has resulted in the need for additional carryout bags. In light of this increased demand, the significant paper bag shortage, and concerns with reusable bags potentially contributing to community spread, we are requesting that municipalities with existing bag ordinances freeze these ordinances for the duration of this crisis and for 30 days after to enable retailers to restock appropriately. Several municipalities have suspended their ordinances, including Stafford, Chatham, Parsippany-Troy and Atlantic Highlands.

Shopper Limitations

NJFC has taken a strong position against the limits on shoppers and check out the link below regarding our comments.

<https://www.roi-nj.com/2020/03/24/lifestyle/food-council-head-limiting-grocery-stores-would-not-allow-residents-to-get-food-they-need/>

NJ Economic Development Authority (EDA) Grant and Loan Program

The NJEDA just released a package of grant and loan programs for small and medium sized businesses and non-profits that were impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. NJBIA put together the details so if interested see the link below:

https://www.njbia.org/eda-grants/?utm_source=Real%20Magnet&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=152612344

We will continue to provide members with timely updates. We are currently working on industry standards for Worker Notification Protocols and Social Distance Guidelines. As always, please contact me at (609) 392-8899 or Mary Ellen Peppard at mpeppard@njfoodcouncil.com if we can provide additional information about these issues.





to the entire food industry and its dedicated employees for their tireless efforts to replenish and restock shelves, while ensuring the cleanliness of stores and facilities for every consumer.

