

Community foundation starts Paynesville Area Response Fund

Friday, March 20: The Paynesville Area Community Foundation (PACF) announced today (Friday, March 20) the establishment of the Paynesville Area Response Fund. The purpose of the fund is to support the local community in times of crisis, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic.

To make a contribution to the fund, visit www.community-giving.org/donate/paynesville-area-response-fund.

Dick Johnson, board chair of the Paynesville Area Community Foundation stated, “Paynesville Area Response Fund is an opportunity to support our friends and neighbors who are facing the greatest needs during this crisis. We are all in this together.”

The Paynesville Area Community Foundation will work with local agencies to identify the greatest needs of the community and disseminate the funds to local 501c(3) nonprofits, governmental, and faith-based organizations. There is also a statewide relief fund being operated by the Minnesota Council on Foundations and the St. Paul and Minnesota Community Foundation. For more information on this fund, visit <https://mcf.org/minnesota-disaster-recovery-fund-coronavirus>.

The Paynesville Area Community Foundation (PACF), a partner of the Central Minnesota Community Foundation and powered by CommunityGiving, is a public charity that attracts and administers charitable funds for the benefit of the local community. The Paynesville Area Community Foundation has grown to over \$4.2 million in assets and awarded over \$595,000 in grants to the community.

Collectively, CommunityGiving administers nearly 850 funds totaling more than \$150 million. Learn more at CommunityGiving.org/Paynesville.

DEED announces small business loan guarantee program

Monday, March 30: The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) is announcing the Minnesota Small Business Loan Guarantee Program, which was approved by the Minnesota Legislature last week. This temporary program, established in response to impacts of COVID-19, provides another option for financing to help small businesses weather this difficult time. DEED estimates that this \$10 million will guarantee \$20 million to \$25 million in loans for Minnesota small businesses. “DEED’s loan guarantee initiative is another example of how Minnesota leaders are working together to ensure we’re doing all we can to help businesses impacted by the COVID-19 crisis,” said Gov. Tim Walz. “These loan guarantees help Minnesota’s small businesses access the capital they need to keep operating during this difficult time.”

“We created this loan guarantee program because we know many small businesses across Minnesota need help and that existing emergency loan programs may not meet the needs of every business,” said DEED commissioner Steve Grove. “The Minnesota Small Business Loan Guarantee Program is part of a slate of emergency small business assistance options DEED is implementing with bipartisan support from the state legislature.”

DEED is not the lender, but it will work with lenders throughout the state to use the loan guarantees to support small business loans. These loan guarantees will facilitate loans for a variety of purposes and can be subordinate to other financing. Allowable loan uses must be exclusively in Minnesota and include machinery or equipment purchases, maintenance, or repair; expenses related to moving into or within Minnesota; and working capital when the working capital is secured by fixed assets when possible.

The loan guarantees can only leverage funds for Minnesota businesses with fewer than the equivalent of 250 employees, which includes the total of all employees at a parent company and at any additional locations. The program will provide an 80-percent guarantee up to a maximum of \$200,000; therefore the maximum loan amount in the loan guarantee program would be \$250,000. The program will be open for up to 12 months from the declaration of the peacetime emergency under Executive Order 20-01 on Friday, March 13.

All loans will be made by lenders enrolled in the Minnesota Small Business Loan Guarantee Program. No loans will come directly from DEED. Eligible lenders include banks or other commercial lenders, public entities, or private nonprofit economic development organizations whose headquarters are located in Minnesota. DEED is now accepting applications from lenders who would like to participate in the program at the lender tab on the Small Business Loan Guarantee Program page of the DEED website.

If your business is seeking funding, please visit the business tab on the page the week of Monday, March 30, to obtain contact information for enrolled lenders as this info becomes available. Each lender will utilize their own established application and underwriting processes for loans.

DEED is the state’s principal economic development agency, promoting business recruitment, expansion and retention, workforce development, international trade, and community development in Minnesota.

Department of Agriculture continuing services across state

Monday, March 30: The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) is continuing inspection services during the two-week stay-at-home period in Minnesota and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes inspections of dairy, meat, and food manufacturing facilities, retail food outlets, pesticide and fertilizer operations, and seed, grain, and nursery companies. “We appreciate the cooperation of our regulated industries during this time of change and uncertainty while we continue to ensure a safe food supply for Minnesota residents,” said an MDA press release. “MDA inspection staff will exercise every option to conduct any field activities in a manner safe for both themselves and the industries we regulate. Our inspectors are following the hygiene and social distancing recommendations of the Minnesota Department of Health.”

“We have made some minor modifications to our inspection services for the protection of your employees and ours, enabling all of us to practice social distancing when possible,” continued the press release.

These inspection modifications include:

Food and Feed Inspection – Retail food inspectors continue field services at operations including grocery stores and other retail food stores. Some inspection activities will be abbreviated and focus on the significant food safety activities which are occurring. MDA will increase outreach by phone and email to efficiently meet info needs about food safety and COVID-19.

The manufactured food inspection program and the commercial feed program continue to perform regulatory oversight and inspection activities while prioritizing response to adverse incidents, high risk complaints, and illness investigations. The produce safety program does not have inspection activities scheduled at this time but remains available for response to a natural disaster or other major adverse event. Program staff are maintaining operations to provide technical support, education, and other outreach for growers.

Dairy Processing Facilities – MDA’s dairy inspection staff are expected to follow all biosecurity and health precautions instituted by dairy manufacturers during in-person visits, and their primary inspection approach will continue to be in-person inspection work. However, some facilities may be concerned about allowing inspectors to visit their facilities. During the COVID-19 situation, MDA dairy inspectors will, upon request, conduct virtual or video-based routine inspections at dairy processing facilities in lieu of conducting in-person inspections. Because of the importance of pasteurizer testing in ensuring pasteurizers are functioning properly, in-person work will still be expected. However, if concerns exist, alternatives may be considered on a case-by-case basis.

MDA also recognizes the key role milk haulers have in the food supply chain. An online testing format has been made available to help expedite the testing process and to allow options for better social distancing during evaluation and licensing procedures.

Pesticide Licensing – With the passage of legislation last week, MDA will now exempt individuals from testing and other licensing requirements to allow them to apply general use antimicrobials for hire to disinfect buildings and control the spread of COVID-19. This exemption will expire on April 1, 2021. There are several specific measures tied to this exemption: the exemption applies ONLY to commercial application of general use pesticide products for the sanitizing or disinfecting treatment for COVID-19; and this exemption DOES NOT include those who commercially apply pesticides in HVAC systems or cooling towers in industrial, commercial, and institutional buildings, residence, and other buildings to prevent, destroy, repel, or mitigate indoor mold, bacteria, or microbes beyond COVID-19.

Seed, Grain, and Nursery Dealers –MDA will continue to provide services, including inspections, that are mandatory for plants or plant products to be sold or moved. This includes phytosanitary certification and shipping point inspection, as well as hemp THC analysis and nursery grower inspections, and fruit and vegetable grading under the agreement with the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service.

For other inspections that do not have a mandated timeline, such as seed, grain, and nursery dealers, MDA is pausing those inspections and will resume them when the governor’s stay-at-home order is lifted. MDA will continue to respond to complaints or other incidents.

Don’t flush that! MPCA warns against flushing anything but TP

Monday, March 30: With the coronavirus outbreak, many people have stocked up on staples like toilet paper, leading to a shortage in some places. This TP shortage may cause consumers to use alternative products such as paper towels, facial tissues, baby wipes, disposable wipes, and other similar items. These products – even those labeled “flushable” – do not break down like toilet paper and can clog pipes, leading to sewer backups and costly repairs, according to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

“Please DO NOT flush items other than TP down the toilet. Place wipes and other products in the trash instead,” stated the MPCA in a press release. “This guidance applies to consumers in cities with municipal systems and those in rural areas with on-site sewer systems.”