

Title: Project activities to help local nursery and garden centers to minimize the impacts from the Covid-19 pandemic

From the outset back in January 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused the most disastrous crisis in human health as well as economy worldwide. In the US, the Spring 2020 COVID-19 outbreak started at the first of the calendar year, and by May, the country started to re-open the economy following a set of guidelines. This USDA-funded project (USDA Award number: 2020-69008-32761) aimed to utilize the TSU research and extension resources, in collaboration with private biotech companies, to help local business to mitigate the impacts from the pandemic. Three local nurseries have been selected to develop the modules of rapid-responses, including Bates Nursery and Garden Center, in Nashville, TN 37207; Mary's Gardens, in Clarksville, TN 37043; and Pleasant View Nursery and Florist, in Pleasant View, TN 37146. In Spring, 2020 when no vaccine was available, we conducted antibody test for employees working in the collaborating business. We partnered with the EDP Biotech Corporation (Knoxville, TN) and tested over 100 people. The results helped to ease the anxiety of employees who thought they may have been infected, or had flu-like symptoms, or in close contact with COVID-positive personnel. We installed temperature station on the nurseries, where customers can choose to take the forehead temperature before proceeding to interact with staff members. We helped the business updating their online website so customers can have a preview of inventories. Whitepapers with information for mitigation of COVID-19 were distributed to customers. By 2022, survey data indicated that nearly half of the consumers are at the age of 51 and above. The proportions of the other age groups are 18-30 (23.98%), 31-40 (12.87%), 41-50 (14.62%); more than 65% of customers received full-dose vaccination and the booster shots. 28.32% of them were not fully vaccinated. In the survey, 123 people cited frequent handwashing as an effective way to stop the spread of the virus. 79 people think that wearing a mask is also an effective means, which is the least among the four options. But they are more than half of the respondents. When asked what symptoms they would have after contracting Covid, respondents thought coughing would be the most common symptom, fatigue, and high fever; only a small number of people selected "no symptom". People are most concerned about getting serious illness, followed by their concern about the impact on food supply; a few people answered that they had not bothered them; some felt that they may lose their job opportunities due to the lockdown. Over 80 percent of the people followed the instruction and keep physical distance each other, a small number of people did not change their life behavior. A small percentage of customers would make a phone call before heading to the nursery and they would visit the website to make sure the nursery has the plants they are looking for.