

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 9, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

Thank you for your leadership during this unprecedented crisis. As the nation responds to mitigate the economic impacts of the Coronavirus (COVID-19), we urgently ask that you provide immediate relief to Florida's agricultural producers.

Florida's agricultural industry has endured multiple crises in recent years, including devastating impacts from Hurricanes Irma and Michael, novel plant diseases such as citrus-greening (Huanglongbing), and the ongoing dumping of perishable produce from Mexico. Florida agriculture always rises to the challenge to weather these difficulties, and it is rising to meet this one. Unfortunately, the current situation may cause irreparable harm without your immediate assistance.

The current economic crisis precipitated by the coronavirus pandemic has caused immeasurable harm to all sectors of Florida's agricultural industry. With demand highly diminished, and with no option for long-term storage, many Florida fruit and vegetable growers are plowing under entire fields of ready-to-harvest crops during the height of their season, having already donated as much of their product to food banks and feeding organizations as possible. Dairy farmers are draining entire semi-trucks of milk into open fields to retrieve minimal utility as fertilizer. Many other agricultural sectors are suffering similar losses, and we are concerned that those losses will increase as warmer weather moves north and other crops reach peak season.

As the state's second largest economic sector, and the breadbasket for the entire eastern seaboard in the winter months, Florida's agriculture industry is vitally important for economic and food security for the state, region, and nation. Given the critical importance of maintaining the viability of Florida agriculture, we ask that you ease the burden of this sudden economic downturn via all available options, including urgently providing direct financial assistance to producers under the authorities given to you in the newly-enacted Coronavirus, Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. Other relief options to consider are Section 32 commodity purchases and offering increased programmatic flexibility in the administration of the Child Nutrition Program and the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP).

We note that the planned U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) field hearings with regard to seasonal and perishable produce have been postponed due to the pandemic, and in the meantime

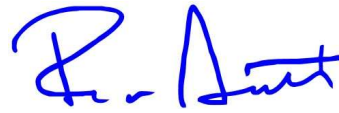
urge you to work with USTR to evaluate and respond to the economic challenges caused by the dumping of Mexican produce.

Thank you, and all of the USDA staff, who have worked tirelessly during this difficult time. With resources provided by Congress, and your leadership, Florida's agriculture industry can survive this pandemic and continue to feed our nation.

Sincerely,



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



Rick Scott
U.S. Senator



Michael Waltz
Member of Congress



Mario Diaz-Balart
Member of Congress



Frederica Wilson
Member of Congress



Brian Mast
Member of Congress



Bill Posey
Member of Congress



Stephanie Murphy
Member of Congress



Ross Spano
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Theodore Deutch
Member of Congress



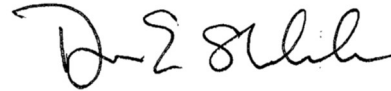
Kathy Castor
Member of Congress



Neal Dunn, M.D.
Member of Congress



Daniel Webster
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Donna Shalala
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Francis Rooney
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Vern Buchanan
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