

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 20, 2017

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We want to thank you for taking swift action in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma in working with the state to ensure that all Floridians in need will be able to access nutritious foods through the Disaster Household Distribution program, as well as the additional flexibility and benefits provided to individuals and families participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Furthermore, your efforts to establish special procedures and enhanced flexibility to assist Florida farmers and ranchers in dealing with the impacts of Hurricane Irma to their businesses and livelihoods are similarly welcome. While these are incredibly important steps to promote recovery, more federal assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is required for our communities, farmers, and small businesses to rebuild after this natural disaster, and must be provided as quickly as possible.

As you have now seen first-hand, the impact of this storm on our state, and particularly the damage it has caused to Florida's diverse agricultural industry, will be an immense challenge to overcome. Florida's citrus industry, which is already fighting an uphill battle against citrus-greening, desperately needs assistance in re-establishing after this catastrophic storm. Last week in Polk County, we met with farmers to survey the intense damage caused by hurricane force winds and rain, resulting in estimates in excess of 50-percent loss of this season's fruit crop, and ultimately, the probable loss of entire groves of citrus trees. While citrus's struggles are instructive, this agricultural disaster wrought by Hurricane Irma is not limited to a single crop or geographic region of the state; it has impacted nearly all agricultural operations across the peninsula, from peanuts and cotton in North Florida to sugarcane and dairy production down south.

Florida's agricultural production is a cornerstone of the state's economy and is essential to the nation's food supply. Florida's farmers and ranchers are fiercely independent and self-sustaining, but after Hurricane Irma's devastation, they will need the federal government's assistance to plow ahead and sow the seeds of a fruitful recovery. We urge you to continue your work with state and local partners to ensure that Florida's rural communities, farmers, ranchers, and small businesses have access to all necessary assistance to rehabilitate farmland and recover from crop losses. To this end, we would appreciate your expedited consideration of any disaster declaration and assistance requests related to Hurricane Irma that you receive in the coming days and weeks.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Rubio', with a stylized, cursive script.

Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Bill Nelson', in a cursive script.

Bill Nelson
U.S. Senator