

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP  
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

January 8, 2019

The Honorable Ron DeSantis  
Governor of Florida  
The Capitol  
400 South Monroe Street  
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Dear Governor DeSantis:

Congratulations on your inauguration as Florida's 46<sup>th</sup> Governor. As you take office today, I know you will be confronted with many important decisions. Given the current stalemate in Washington over the federal government shutdown, the choices you will be forced to make in the early days of your new administration are particularly consequential. To that end, I urge you to direct Florida's Department of Emergency Management (DEM) to quickly begin disbursing Florida Citrus Recovery Block Grant (CRBG) funds to eligible citrus growers to restore confidence in Florida's signature crop, and buoy family farms and small businesses in our state's struggling rural communities.

As a consequence of the federal government shutdown, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has been forced to stop processing Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity Program (WHIP) applications and all disaster assistance payments. This is incredibly unfortunate for the many family farms throughout our state who are still struggling to get by after Hurricane Irma roared across the peninsula in September 2017. Citrus growers have been particularly devastated. After years of production losses on account of citrus greening, the 2017-18 season was supposed to mark the first uptick in production in over a decade. Instead, Hurricane Irma reduced the surviving crop to the lowest in over sixty years.

Nonetheless, you have the ability to immediately help those citrus producers whose WHIP applications were processed before the shutdown. Last year, I secured the creation of a \$343 million block grant for Florida citrus with the help of colleagues in Congress, including former Senator Bill Nelson and former Congressman Tom Rooney. These funds have already been transferred to DEM, and thus are not impacted by the federal shutdown. However, to date it appears that less than one percent of those funds have been disbursed to impacted growers.

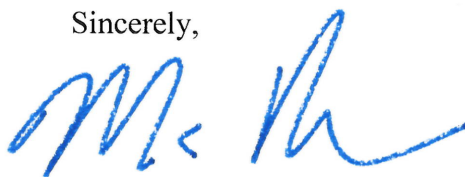
It appears some of the delay in disbursing funds is a result of duplicative and unnecessary DEM disbursement restrictions that USDA is already responsible for enforcing with respect to associated WHIP payment eligibility. DEM's choice to delay disbursement of these critical funds extends the financial hardship for thousands of Floridians who work in or depend on a thriving citrus industry, and robs our state's economy of the benefits from federal taxpayer dollars that have already been allocated.

Given these circumstances, I urge you to immediately re-evaluate DEM's CRBG disbursement policies to quickly infuse Florida's citrus industry and rural communities with the

federal disaster assistance Congress has provided. Additionally, as you work to deliver this much needed aid, please do not hesitate to bring to my attention any outstanding CRBG disbursement issues for which DEM requires clarification from USDA.

Thank you for your consideration of this urgent matter. I look forward to working with you to advance conservative principles and the interests of the people of the Great State of Florida.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Rubio', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Marco Rubio  
U.S. Senator