

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

March 6, 2018

The Honorable Sonny Perdue  
U.S. Secretary of Agriculture  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

The Congressional intent behind language in Title I of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 was to provide your office with \$2.3 billion to administer direct payments to producers who sustained hurricane and wildfire-related crop losses in 2017. In order for this program to effectively meet the unique needs of Florida agriculture, we echo the statements made in Florida Commissioner of Agriculture Adam Putnam's March 5<sup>th</sup> letter emphasizing that direct payments provided under this program **should not** be subject to strict payment and income limitations.

As a reminder, we wrote to you in October and told you that Congress would provide you with the additional resources and flexibility you need to adequately respond to the needs of Florida agriculture. The funding included in this law, if properly implemented, will be crucial to enabling Florida's farmers, ranchers, and nursery growers who have suffered severe losses to begin the process of rebuilding. However, as Congress continues its Constitutional role in overseeing how you are implementing the funding for this program, the intent in the following key areas is clear:

- If the Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) restrictions present in most of USDA's traditional disaster assistance programs are applied to the administration of the \$2.3 billion, the vast majority of Florida's producers would be ineligible to receive relief. Specifically, according to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, 78 percent of Florida farms would be unable to apply to receive disaster assistance through this program. Given that the cost of battling citrus greening has driven smaller growers out of the citrus industry over the past decade, income and payment limitations would exclude a large portion of the industry from the program, thereby defeating our intent of helping stabilize the entire industry. ***That is why the \$2.3 billion was intentionally provided directly to the Office of the Secretary in order to address agriculture recovery needs unmet by existing disaster assistance programs. Additionally, Congress included broad, yet clear language that was intended to give you the maximum flexibility to provide relief to all agricultural producers who've suffered disaster-related crop losses, regardless of size or income. The storm did not discriminate based on a producer's size and our intent is for all affected agriculture producers be eligible for relief within the total amount provided.***
- Additionally, the funding is intended to be used to compensate agricultural producers "for necessary expenses related to crops, trees, bushes, and vine losses related to the consequences of Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, Maria, and other hurricanes and wildfires occurring in calendar year 2017." ***Imposing preemptive payment limitations on the total amount a producer, an***

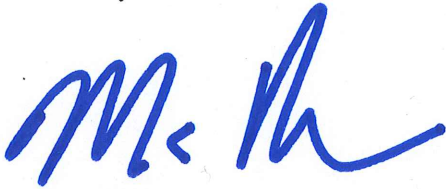
*individual, or entity is eligible to receive runs contrary to Congressional intent, which is to reimburse growers for up to 85 percent of disaster-related crop losses.*

Hurricane Irma destroyed some of our state's most productive agricultural lands, causing over \$2 billion in crop losses and \$2.5 billion in total damage and losses across all segments of Florida agriculture. There is hardly a commodity group that was not impacted by this historic event, which as you know, particularly devastated Florida's iconic citrus industry.

We fully support the requests made by Commissioner Putnam in his March 5<sup>th</sup> letter. It is critical that you exercise the flexibility provided to you by Congress as you develop and administer these disaster relief payments. As we work together to adequately respond to last year's disasters, please understand that for many of Florida's growers, time is of the essence. If the federal government doesn't act quickly – Florida orange juice as we know it could cease to exist.

We appreciate your understanding of the need for this program and for the need of standing up a program that will be effective for all impacted producers in damage-ridden states and territories. This whole-of-government effort is necessary in this extremely rare situation in which an entire domestic industry is at risk of decimation. We thank you for your cooperation to date and for your dedication to United States agriculture.

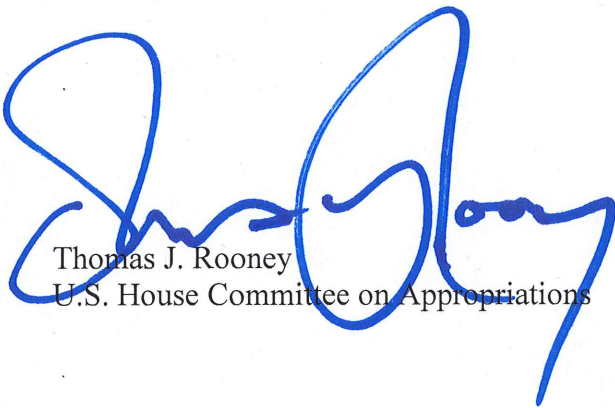
Sincerely,



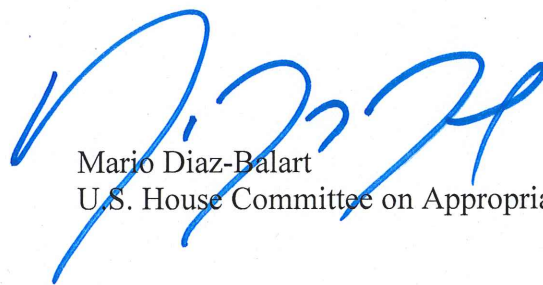
Marco Rubio  
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations



Bill Nelson  
United States Senator

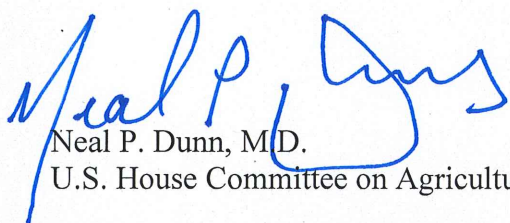



Thomas J. Rooney  
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations

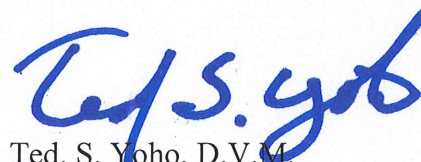


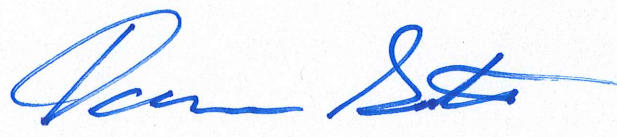
Mario Diaz-Balart  
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations

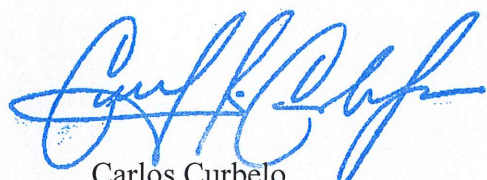



  
Neal P. Dunn, M.D.  
U.S. House Committee on Agriculture


  
Debbie Wasserman Schultz  
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations


  
Ted. S. Yoho, D.V.M.  
U.S. House Committee on Agriculture

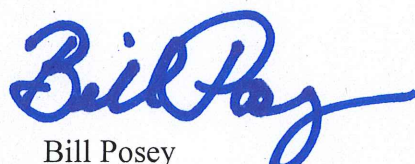
  
Darren Soto  
U.S. House Committee on Agriculture

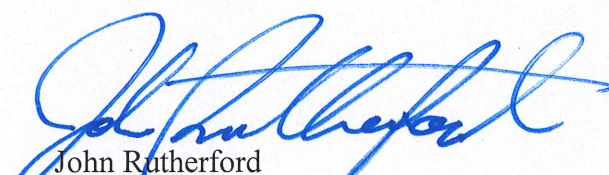
  
Carlos Curbelo  
Member of Congress

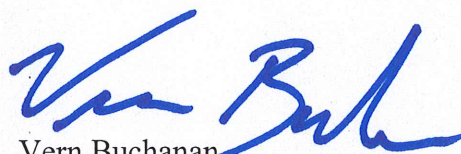
  
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Member of Congress


  
Charlie Crist  
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Francis Rooney  
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Bill Posey  
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John Rutherford  
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Vern Buchanan  
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Alcee L. Hastings  
Member of Congress

CC:

Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services William Northey  
Acting Farm Service Agency Administrator Steven Peterson  
Acting Risk Management Agency Administrator Heather Manzano