

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

September 27, 2005

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jerry Lewis
Chairman
House Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Robert C. Byrd
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable David R. Obey
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Sirs:

As you draft the next supplemental disaster package for the Gulf region ravaged by Hurricane Katrina, we wanted to provide you with the latest agricultural losses suffered by the state of Florida due to Hurricanes Katrina and Dennis this hurricane season. The Florida Department of Agriculture estimates the state's agriculture industry suffered \$655, 896, 956 in losses due to Hurricanes Katrina and Dennis in 2005. In addition, the damages to the oyster industry due to the storms totaled \$38.5 million and approximately 600 bee colonies were destroyed. We realize the devastation from Hurricane Katrina is far greater in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama, but Florida's growers also suffered substantial losses and respectfully request to be included in the next supplemental.

As you may know, agriculture is a \$62 billion industry in Florida and only four percent of Florida's crops receive federal financial assistance through commodity support programs, so the only safety net our agriculture producers have is a federal agriculture disaster package. The traditional crop disaster payment programs do not work well for our specialty crops. If some of those programs were slightly adjusted, our growers would benefit. Under the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP), debris cleanup for nurseries (shade cloth, potted plants, etc.) is not considered eligible. Under the Livestock Assistance Program (LAP), a grower is not eligible for assistance unless the county in which he or she farms received 90 days of excess rainfall by November 15th. Florida's rain typically comes after August 15th within 90 days of November 15th, making our cattlemen ineligible. Similarly, nurseries do not qualify for the Tree Assistance Program (TAP) because currently under TAP only a tree that produces a crop is eligible for assistance, not a tree that is the actual crop. Another way to assist Florida growers, in addition to these minor changes to current programs, would be to distribute the \$150 million that remains in the Section 32 account for Florida growers from the 2004 hurricane season.

All of the growers hit by hurricanes this season deserve assistance. We urge you to include Florida's losses in the next emergency supplemental. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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