

DEBBIE MUCARSEL-POWELL  
26TH DISTRICT, FLORIDA

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON  
TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE

**Congress of the United States**  
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April 9, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

Thank you for your efforts to sustain American agriculture production and our nation's food supply during the Coronavirus pandemic. As you may know, the losses to the Florida's fresh produce industry, which is currently in the midst of peak growing season, have been swift, staggering and devastating. Producers of highly perishable fruits and vegetables in my congressional district and throughout the state have witnessed their markets disappear, and a great many Florida growers have been forced to abandon their crops, rather than reach those in need.

As noted in my March 27 letter joined by others in the Florida Congressional Delegation, "The spread of the coronavirus has presented an extraordinary threat to local fruit and vegetable farms in Florida. Our state's farmers supply much of the winter and spring produce to our nation..." Therefore, I write to urge you to quickly implement the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, through which Congress provided \$9.5 billion in support for agricultural producers impacted by the novel coronavirus. Please work expeditiously and transparently to allocate this critical relief now to farmers, such as those in Florida, on the front line of feeding our nation, who are at greatest risk of losing agriculture operations moving forward because of the coronavirus.

Agriculture is Florida's second largest industry. Fruits and vegetables, in particular, contribute \$6.03 billion<sup>1</sup> to the state's economy. Unfortunately, due to the ongoing public health crisis, many of our specialty crop farmers are facing extreme economic hardship without their traditional supply chains, which largely comprise restaurants and food service companies. Reports suggest that tomato sales are down 85 percent and green beans and cabbage sales have been cut in half<sup>2</sup>. My constituents tell me that they have fields worth of highly perishable crops sitting idle and rotting

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<sup>1</sup> [1] UF/IFAS EDIS document FE1020, "Economic Contributions of Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Food Industries in Florida in 2015," <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fe1020>

<sup>2</sup> [2] Gene McAvoy, *Day South Florida Agriculture Changed*, Southeast Ag Net, April 8, 2020, <http://southeastagnet.com/2020/04/08/day-south-florida-agriculture-changed/>

away. Farms are exercising triage dumping, emptying coolers, and terminating fields for which they have no foreseeable markets. This is their livelihood, and our nation's food supply.

If our farmers do not receive relief quickly, they may not have the financial resources to plant and harvest crops in the next season, jeopardizing our nation's food supply. I understand there are processes and procedures that must occur for the funds provided for by the CARES Act to be disbursed, but I urge you to consider the grave circumstances of our farmers whose crops are extremely perishable and disproportionately affected by this public crisis, and prioritize disbursements of funds to these most vulnerable farmers first.

Every day that passes without assistance to our farmers jeopardizes our continued ability to feed our nation moving forward. We are almost out of time.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Debbie Mucarsel-Powell', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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Debbie Mucarsel-Powell  
Member of Congress