



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES
COMMISSIONER NICOLE “NIKKI” FRIED
THE CAPITOL

March 31, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

Thank you for your leadership, support for America’s farmers, and continued work to “do right and feed everyone,” even in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. As Florida’s Commissioner of Agriculture, I write to you today on behalf of our state’s agriculture industry. Our state’s 47,000 farms, which support two million jobs, are facing unprecedented challenges due to COVID-19 market disruptions.

With H.R. 748, the CARES Act, being signed into law on March 27, 2020, we urge the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to swiftly act to get the \$9.5 billion in agriculture financial assistance into the hands of our farmers impacted by COVID-19 as quickly as possible. While the USDA works to implement and administer these funds, we urge you to take action now to allow more local growers and farmers in Florida to participate in federal food purchase and distribution programs, including exercising USDA’s Section 32 purchasing authority.

We are thankful the CARES Act provided an additional \$8.8 billion for school nutrition programs and \$450 million for the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) to purchase additional commodities and provide food to families in need. While the Florida Department of Agriculture administers these programs in our state, the purchasing power remains with the USDA. Therefore, we ask that you allow the flexibility needed to connect our Florida farmers, who have a surplus of high-quality products sitting in the fields and on the shelves due to the closure of many restaurants and other food service establishments, with our local food banks, school meal programs, and other federal food purchase and distribution programs so we may all continue to “do right and feed everyone.”

Florida’s farmers are the best in the world – from fresh fruit and vegetables to seafood and dairy, providing 300 nutritious commodities year-round. But given the current market disruptions, Florida growers are reporting major losses. After donating hundreds of thousands of pounds of fresh produce to local food banks, there are reports of millions more that will go bad – from one Florida grower who estimates 10 million pounds of tomato will be left on their vines to another making the hard decision to plow under one million pounds of green beans and four million pounds of cabbage.

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I applaud our farmers and producers who have shown unbelievable resilience as they continue to work day in and day out to feed our communities during this trying time. Now, we must make sure our farmers, who are also struggling in the current market even as they continue to provide for others, are not left behind and food is not left to waste.

Acting expeditiously to allow flexibility for the USDA to purchase products as well as to administer the direct relief provided through the CARES Act will not only help mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on our farmers and producers in Florida, but it will also help maintain a strong food supply to continue providing healthy food for our neighbors in need.

Thank you again for your leadership and consideration of this urgent request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Nicole Fried". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Nicole Fried
Commissioner of Agriculture