

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 27, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

As the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) moves to implement measures in light of the Proclamation on Declaring a National Emergency Concerning the Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Outbreak, we urge you to consider relief for local Florida produce growers and prioritize the purchasing of commodities from these local producers.

The spread of the coronavirus has presented an extraordinary threat to local fruit and vegetable farms in Florida. Our state's farmers, who supply much of the winter and spring produce to our nation and grow some of the best tomatoes, green beans, lettuce, cabbage, and so much more, are struggling. The unanticipated closure of farmer's markets, cessation of cruise lines, and the limited capacity or closure of restaurants, schools, and food service has placed a tremendous strain on the incomes and livelihoods of local growers and agricultural producers. Many farmers in Florida have amassed large stocks of nutritious fruits and vegetables that they are simply unable to sell due to the nationwide shutdown of supporting industries. With so many families suddenly facing food insecurity, and the economic strain farmers are experiencing, these stores of perishable local produce should be prioritized for distribution to those in need.

Accordingly, we strongly urge the USDA to consider exercising its Section 32 purchasing authority to procure local fruit and vegetables for federal nutrition programs in Florida and across the country. Utilizing this authority is especially appropriate given the additional emergency funding Congress recently appropriated for federal nutrition programs. Moreover, we request consideration of regulatory flexibility in implementing these purchasing authorities to acquire local produce, including the relaxing of provisions that govern the aesthetic requirements of produce purchased by the USDA. A commitment from the USDA to purchase these available fruits and vegetables will not only provide critical relief to local growers and farmers, it will provide necessary assistance and nutritional value to needy families struggling in the midst of this pandemic.

Acting on these steps would help address the economic insecurity felt by local farmers and producers in Florida and across the nation. Thank you for your consideration of this pressing request.

Sincerely,



Debbie Mucarsel-Powell
Member of Congress



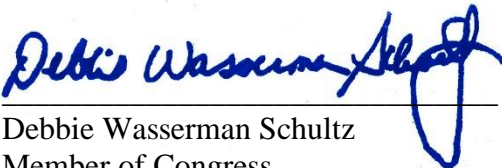
Donna E. Shalala
Member of Congress



Theodore Deutch
Member of Congress



Mario Diaz-Balart
Member of Congress



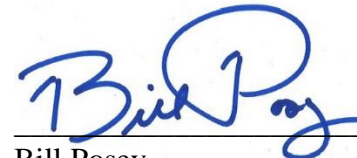
Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress



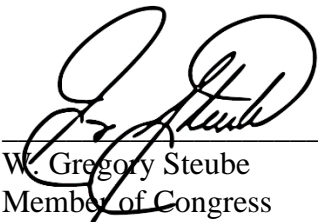
Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress



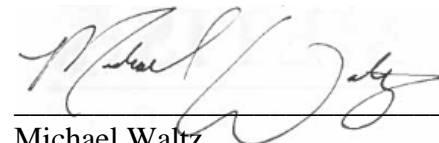
Stephanie Murphy
Member of Congress



Bill Posey
Member of Congress



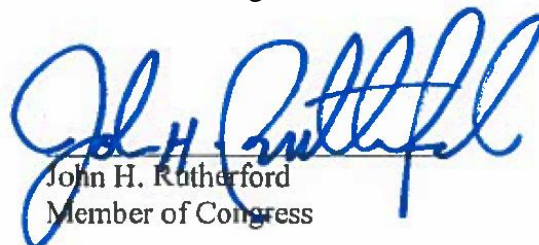
W. Gregory Steube
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