



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

March 24, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McConnell, Leader McCarthy, and Leader Schumer:

Thank you for your leadership and continued work to protect Americans and our economy 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 – Florida’s second largest industry and first in times of economic downturns. Our 47,000 farms support two million jobs and produce 300 commodities that feed our neighbors, our communities, and the world.

We greatly appreciate the U.S. Department of Homeland Security designating agriculture and the food industry as critical infrastructure. As Congress looks towards additional action and relief in response to COVID-19, I respectfully request that you include the needed statutory authority and flexibility of federal agencies to support American farmers as they continue to keep our food supply strong. This would include:

- Opening up the U.S. Small Business Administration’s Economic Injury Disaster Loans program to all agriculture and agriculture-related businesses.
- Providing direct financial assistance to farmers and ranchers through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).
- Allowing flexibility to expand participation in USDA food purchase and distribution programs, including Section 32, to allow more local growers to become approved USDA vendors and mitigate the costs associated with new market distribution.
- Continuing to provide further guidance and certainty that the U.S. agriculture industry will have access to the labor workforce needed to continue their work feeding American families.
- Ensuring our school lunch and other critical child nutrition programs continue to have the flexibility and funding needed to feed our children (the Florida Department of Agriculture administers the state’s \$1.3 billion School Lunch Program, serving 245 million free/reduced lunches to two million kids).
- Providing additional financial assistance to supplemental nutrition programs that support seniors in-need, such as the Commodity Supplemental Food Program.
- Allowing common sense flexibility of regulatory requirements for programs that provide nutrition assistance to families in need, like The Emergency Food Assistance Program and WIC/Farmers Market Nutrition Program.
- Prioritizing broadband infrastructure investments in rural communities, a critical need made even more urgent by actions taken to contain COVID-19, like school closures and telemedicine delivery.

Congressional Leadership

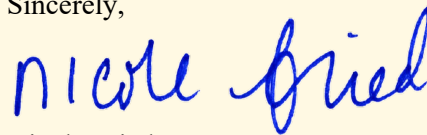
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I ask that Congress swiftly provide the support, authority, and flexibility our agriculture industry needs to continue the critical work of providing a safe and stable food supply to American families throughout this crisis.

Thank you again for your leadership and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "nicole fried". The signature is written in a cursive, lowercase style.

Nicole Fried

Commissioner of Agriculture