



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

**Statement of the Honorable Nicole “Nikki” Fried
U.S. International Trade Commission
Hearing on Injury RE: Investigation No. TA-201-77 (Fresh, Chilled, or Frozen Blueberries)
January 12, 2021**

Chairman Kearns and fellow commissioners, I thank the U.S. International Trade Commission for holding this hearing as part of your investigation into the urgent issue of unfair trade practices being employed by Mexico and other foreign exporters resulting in a surge of blueberry imports that have devastated the domestic industry for decades. I also thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak today, as Florida’s Commissioner of Agriculture, on behalf of our state’s \$62.3 million blueberry industry that has seen its market share decline by 38 percent from its high in 2015. To put that in perspective, that’s a decrease of 7.6 percent each year from 2015 to 2020 and a total loss of \$67 million in potential value of production. Yet since Mexican blueberries entered the U.S. market in 2009, its market share has seen an increase of 2,100 percent. Let that sink in: two thousand, one hundred percent.

Given the purview of today’s hearing, I am providing the ITC with a report produced by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumers Services, which I oversee, that clearly shows the economic harm that Mexico’s blueberry exports have had on Florida’s industry, which has been significant given our similar seasons. During our harvest season, the report shows that between the years of 2016 to 2020, Florida’s blueberry market share barely inched upwards while the market share of Mexican imports more than doubled. From 2015 to 2016, we saw a single-year increase of 41 percent in Mexican imports that cost our state \$28 million – that’s equivalent to 451 jobs, \$2.8 million in decreased indirect tax revenue, and an overall \$55.4 million negative economic impact.

But as you will hear from others today, Mexico isn’t the only country engaging in these unfair practices to the detriment of the domestic market; we have also seen a surge in blueberry imports from Peru, Chile, Argentina, and Canada. Florida also isn’t alone in seeing its blueberry industry struggling without access to remedies or protections in the face of these surges, as Georgia, Michigan, and California growers have united with those in our state to seek relief here today as the American Blueberry Growers Alliance. And unfortunately, these unfair trade practices are not isolated to the blueberry industry, but are causing major harm to a multitude of domestic producers of seasonal and perishable commodities.

That is why I am also providing the full report I presented at the August 2020 hearings held by the U.S. Trade Representative along with the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Commerce that led us here today, as it is vital that the ITC have the full picture of what our growers have endured since NAFTA was enacted. Of the 24 Florida commodities assessed in that report, 20 experienced market share declines from 2000-2019 while at the same time Mexico’s market share increased by 100 percent or more for 13 of those same commodities.

These shocking figures alone should be enough to prompt action, but I hope that as the ITC continues its work you also see the faces of the American farmers that the numbers represent. Without access to timely and effective relief, more American families will struggle as jobs are lost, communities are disrupted, and our domestic food supply is weakened. Year after year, our farmers prove resilient in the face of great challenges, as this past year has clearly illustrated. While we can’t stop pandemics or natural disasters, this is one challenge the International Trade Commission can take on. America’s growers are the best in the world, and the ITC can help them succeed by providing a level playing field for our producers to compete.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak on this urgent issue for Florida producers. I am confident that with the ITC’s action, we will continue to keep Florida growing.