



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

February 9, 2022

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

I write today in support of the State of Florida’s request for a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretarial Disaster Designation for Florida counties impacted by freezing temperatures at the end of January, which as you are aware, must be requested by the Governor or by an FSA State Executive Director (SED). This designation is critical for our impacted producers to receive the federal assistance needed to respond to and recover from this extreme weather event.

As you may know, agriculture is Florida’s second largest economic driver with a \$149.5 billion economic impact and supporting two million jobs. Our state produces over 300 commodities, and thanks to our subtropical climate, there are Florida crops in season all 12 months of the year. For that same reason, our harvests were hit particularly hard by the recent record cold temperatures we saw across the state at the end of January. While our producers did their best to prepare and are resilient in the face of many ongoing challenges, the damage caused by the freeze is extensive, which is why I called on Florida’s Governor to declare a state of emergency on February 2, 2022, to provide needed state support.

After successfully advocating for the Florida state of emergency declaration, my Department was able to secure an emergency order from the Florida Department of Transportation suspending size and weight restrictions of any vehicles traveling within the state that are transporting agriculture commodities and citrus as recommended by me as Florida’s Commissioner of Agriculture. This order allows our impacted farmers to move as much produce as possible while it is still salvageable. But it is clear the losses necessitate further support from our federal partners. That is why I write to you today on behalf of Florida’s fruit and vegetable producers to urge swift approval of Florida’s request for a USDA Secretarial Disaster Designation to provide our farmers access to additional federal assistance.

While you consider this request, I wanted to share some of the impact we are seeing on the ground that merits this designation as our Department remains in close contact with our industry partners as assessments continue. In Hendry County, our staff toured over 1,600 acres of sweet corn that was damaged or a complete loss. Touring 600 acres of green beans, all stages of the plants and beans were impacted—from significant bloom drop and freezing injury to anticipated damage when harvesting that will result in the produce not making grade. In Palm Beach County, various types of lettuces over approximately 500 acres of farmlands had visible injuries. Additionally, we expect impacts on our citrus, celery, radish, and sugar harvests, among others. On behalf of our impacted producers, we would welcome the opportunity to have you visit Florida to view firsthand the devastating harm caused by the recent freeze requiring a disaster designation and federal support to recover.

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Thank you again for your consideration of this urgent request, and for your continued dedication and service to agriculture. Please know that the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services stands ready to assist the USDA as Florida's agriculture community recovers from this destructive extreme weather event.

Sincerely,

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

Nicole Fried  
Florida Commissioner of Agriculture