



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES
COMMISSIONER WILTON SIMPSON
THE CAPITOL

September 6, 2023

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250
Email: agsec@usda.gov

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

As Florida Commissioner of Agriculture and lifelong farmer, I know firsthand how valuable the contributions that Florida farmers and those in the agriculture industry make in the lives of every American. The agriculture industry in Florida, with almost 50,000 farms producing nearly 300 different commodities, has a more than \$180 billion impact on the state's economy and supports more than two million jobs. Known for their high quality, Florida products are enjoyed by people throughout the nation and in 160 other countries around the world. Agriculture is not only a huge part of our economic engine in Florida, but also a domestic and national security issue. Without a safe, affordable, and abundant food supply, we cannot survive.

On Wednesday, August 30, 2023, Hurricane Idalia made landfall with 125 mph winds as a Category 3 hurricane, just the third to hit Florida's Big Bend since the 1850s and tied for the strongest hurricane to hit the Big Bend. That said, this storm brought destruction to the Big Bend region of Florida that most have never experienced, and the impacts were felt throughout West Central Florida. While this region is not as densely populated as other regions of the state, its agricultural economy and production is vital to the state and nation.

Early observations illustrate severe damage to apiculture, aquaculture, citrus, corn, cotton, dairy, environmental horticulture, peanuts, poultry, timber, and a variety of fruit, vegetable, and nut crops. In addition to crop and livestock losses, there is catastrophic loss to infrastructure. Fencing, barns, and equipment has been destroyed or rendered useless. Given these observations, we believe the flexibilities in reporting deadlines and sign-up periods for standing disaster programs are warranted where applicable.

My office will have a preliminary economic impact data in the coming weeks that I will share with you as well. I look forward to working with you to ensure farmers and ranchers access to standing disaster assistance programs and advocating for appropriated assistance to rebuild critical infrastructure for the economic driver of this area of Florida.

Please do not hesitate to contact us for additional information or clarification.

Your attention to this matter is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Wilton Simpson
Commissioner of Agriculture