



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

THE CAPITOL

November 4, 2021

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

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

Thank you for your continued service and dedication to supporting our country’s farmers and domestic agriculture industry. I write to you today as Florida’s Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services and on behalf of Florida’s \$149.5 billion agriculture industry to bring to your attention the urgent challenges our farmers are facing when it comes to unfair foreign trade following your recent meeting with Mexican Secretary of Agriculture and Rural Development Victor Villalobos.

For decades, our domestic seasonal produce industry has been devastated by unfair foreign trade practices employed by Mexico and others as NAFTA allowed our domestic markets to be flooded with cheap produce from Mexico due to its government’s subsidies along with lower labor, safety, and environmental standards. Our farmers deserve and demand fairness. That is why since my first days in office, I have been calling on federal officials to provide timely and effective relief for our farmers faced with mounting economic losses as these unfair trade practices continue to go unchecked year after year. Given the failings of the USMCA to address this issue, the need for action is even more urgent today.

Given the disproportionate negative impact these practices have had on Florida farmers, who produce similar agricultural products during similar seasons as Mexico, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) has produced several major reports looking at the economic harm our agriculture industry has and continues to experience. FDACS most recent report released on August 30, 2021 found that Florida seasonal producers saw 10-20 percent lost sales annually due to the expansion of Mexican imports, resulting in an overall negative economic impact of between 1.99 billion and 3.99 billion dollars. That equates to up to 35,741 jobs lost in our state alone, creating an untenable business climate for farmers and putting many out of business altogether. I have enclosed a copy of this report, along with the 2020 FDACS report that I submitted as part of my testimony at the hearing held by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR), and the U.S. Department of Commerce on trade-distorting policies affecting seasonal and perishable products on August 13, 2020. The 2020 report found that specialty crop imports from Mexico increased 551 percent between 2000-2019, with their U.S. domestic share of market increasing by 217 percent while Florida’s declined by 40 percent over the same time period.

As I stated in my testimony at the time, one cannot deny the harm being caused when faced with the data and the dire need for federal officials to take immediate action under its existing trade authorities to stem the losses within our domestic seasonal produce industry. I was pleased to again lend my support to the *Defending Domestic Produce Production Act* when it was reintroduced in the U.S. House and U.S. Senate this summer with the support of the entire bipartisan delegation, as well as members of Congress from Georgia and Michigan; this legislation would provide domestic producers of seasonal produce with the enforcement tools they need to remain competitive. I strongly

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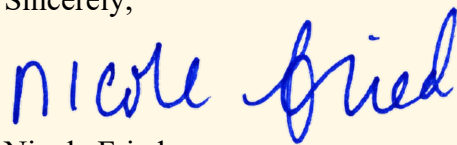
encourage that your Department work with the USTR and U.S. Department of Commerce to enact much-needed and long-overdue remedies outlined in this bipartisan, bicameral, multi-state bill to provide timely and effective relief to American farmers suffering due to Mexico's unfair trade practices.

Unfortunately, in the face of continued inaction on protections for our domestic seasonal industry, we also were recently made aware of a deeply troubling action that stands to further devastate Florida farmers and our state's citrus industry. There appears to have been a "patch" quietly issued earlier this year eliminating juice content requirements for fresh grapefruit being imported from Mexico and other countries while the domestic industry is still required to adhere to these standards. This deeply troubling action is creating further unfair advantages for Mexico and others over our domestic industry, which is already facing challenges when it comes to citrus greening as well as loss of access to foreign markets due to supply chain issues causing backlogs at U.S. ports. This misguided move also stands to have a lasting devastating effect on the domestic industry if consumers turn away from fresh grapefruit overall due to receiving sub-standard foreign imports, with estimates that 80 percent of the fruit coming across the southern border do not meet juice content standards. With Florida's grapefruit season kicking off now, time is of the essence when it comes to correcting this issue. I urge you to direct officials in your Department to immediately reinstate juice content requirements on grapefruit imports so that our domestic industry is treated fairly.

Florida farmers and American agriculture is the best in the world, and we are used to competition. But right now, we know Mexico and others are not fighting fair. We need federal action to level the playing field for our seasonal producers and citrus farmers who drive our economy, create jobs, and feed our families.

Thank you again for your attention to these urgent issues that are critical to Florida agriculture, our state's second largest industry. I look forward to working with you towards solutions that put American farmers and our domestic agriculture industry first.

Sincerely,



Nicole Fried
Florida Commissioner of Agriculture

cc: The Honorable Katherine Tai, U.S. Trade Representative