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September 30, 2024

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary  
U.S Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

I am writing to bring to your attention the significant damage that has been inflicted on Florida's Big Bend region due to recent hurricanes, with devastating effects on the local agricultural industry. Over the last 14 months, this region has endured three hurricanes that have severely impacted farming operations Hurricane Idalia, Hurricane Debby and most recently Hurricane Helene. Rainfall data being utilized by the Risk Management Agency (RMA) has been inconsistent with rainfall data from local Water Management Districts in the State of Florida, which have impacted producers' access to disaster payments.

Hurricane Idalia caused widespread destruction across the Big Bend in 2023, with intense winds and heavy rainfall devastating crops, livestock, and infrastructure. Farmers are still grappling with extensive flooding and damage to their fields, which has further strained their ability to recover. More than 3.3 million acres of Florida's agriculture land were affected by Hurricane Idalia, and these lands typically produce over \$3.9 billion dollars of agriculture products a year. Hurricane Debby dealt another severe blow to the region on August 3, 2024. With torrential rain and hurricane-force winds, Debby caused catastrophic damage to crops, destroyed irrigation systems, and left many farms with unworkable fields. More than 2.2 million acres of agricultural lands were affected by Hurricane Debby and these lands typically produce over \$3 billion dollars of agricultural products a year.

Most recently the region was hit with Hurricane Helene, which made landfall as a Category 4 major hurricane on September 26, 2024. Individuals and communities are just beginning to learn the extent of damages to the region to begin the path to recovery, and we must ensure our farmers and ranchers are provided the resources to recover. This hurricane is believed to be one of the strongest hurricanes to strike this part of the State in recorded history with maximum sustained winds of 140 miles per hour, storm surge up to 10 feet, and flash flooding with up to 15 inches of rain. Florida's agricultural industry plays a critical role in both the state and national economy, and it is imperative that USDA takes swift and decisive action to help these producers recover and rebuild. The damage to crops, livestock, equipment, and infrastructure poses a threat not only to local economies, but also to the nation's food supply chain.

As these farmers work to recover, many are concerned about the accuracy of the rainfall data used by the RMA to assess crop insurance claims. Inconsistent or inaccurate rainfall measurements can result in miscalculations of payments, which unfairly penalizes those who have been hardest hit by these disasters. I respectfully request that the USDA allow for flexibility in how the RMA collects and uses this data, particularly to ensure it reflects the actual conditions on the ground. By adopting a more localized and precise approach to assessing damage, we can help provide the necessary support to ensure these farms can rebuild and continue operating.

Thank you for your attention to this pressing issue. I look forward to working with you to provide meaningful relief to Florida's farmers.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kat Cammack". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kat" and last name "Cammack" clearly legible.

Kat Cammack  
Member of Congress  
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