

THE FLORIDA SENATE

Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1100

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Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture,
Environment, and General Government
Governmental Oversight and Accountability

SENATOR BEN ALBRITTON

26th District

March 12, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue, Secretary
The United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Secretary Perdue,

Thank you for your leadership in helping Florida citrus recover in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma. As you saw during your visit just a week after this catastrophic act of God hit our state, the damage to Florida's citrus growing region was widespread and extensive with roughly 80% of the industry impacted by this historic event.

As you are aware, Hurricane Irma was a devastating blow to an industry already struggling from the impacts of Citrus Greening making the need for timely relief critical. Unfortunately, seventeen months after Hurricane Irma, the vast majority of the disaster assistance provided by Congress has yet to get into the hands of producers. Governor Ron DeSantis and Director Jared Moskowitz have done an excellent job prioritizing the distribution of Block Grant dollars at the state level. However, our research has shown the processing time for WHIP payments through the Farm Service Agency offices continues to be an issue. This in turn delays the State's ability to process Citrus Recovery Block Grant applications in a timely manner. This situation was only exacerbated by the federal shutdown with Florida's citrus growers caught in the middle.

Further, there are several outstanding issues pertaining to the interaction between the WHIP program and the State Block Grant as well as policy decisions on the requirements of the Block Grant that need resolution by the USDA. The response to these concerns have been slow to materialize. Any assistance you could provide in bolstering the resources available to expedite

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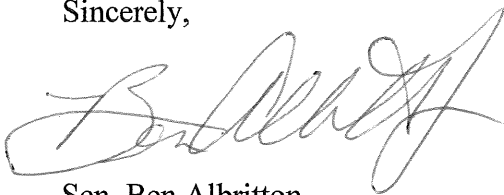
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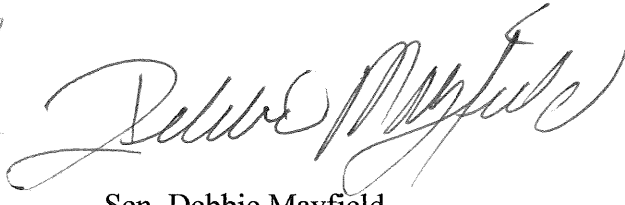
processing of WHIP payments and encouraging programmatic staff to bring resolution to these outstanding issues would be very much appreciated.

Again, we are very grateful for your continued support of Florida's iconic citrus industry and look forward to working with you to bring quick resolution to all outstanding impediments to the delivery of this much needed disaster assistance.

Sincerely,



Sen. Ben Albritton
Chair, Agriculture Committee



Sen. Debbie Mayfield
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture
Environment & General Government

CC: Governor Ron DeSantis
President Bill Galvano
Speaker Jose Oliva
Majority Leader Kathleen Passidomo
Sen. Wilton Simpson