

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 13, 2017

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen
Chairman
House Appropriations Committee
H-305, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
1016 Longworth HOB
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairmen Frelinghuysen and Cochran and Ranking Members Lowey and Leahy:

The 2017 hurricane season was the most costly and damaging on record. As Congress works to develop and pass a supplemental appropriations bill to help millions of Americans recover and rebuild their lives, we write to urge you to ensure that farm and ranch families are a full part of our recovery efforts under this critical and urgently needed legislation.

We strongly believe that the emergency supplemental must, at minimum, address serious backlogs and eliminate red tape under current emergency programs, provide immediate targeted assistance where there are holes in the farm safety net, and repair the farm safety net where necessary so we do not find ourselves in the same position as we are today when the next natural disaster strikes.

Specifically, we urge the supplemental to address the backlogs in key emergency recovery programs, including the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) and the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP). We also urge that the supplemental eliminate the red tape under existing standing disaster programs, including the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP), the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honey Bees, and Farm-raised Fish Program (ELAP), and the Tree Assistance Program (TAP), where arbitrary pay limits, means testing, caps on eligible acreage and available funds, and restrictions that deny help in the case of damage to animals or trees are frustrating recovery efforts.

In addition, we urge the supplemental to include immediate, targeted assistance needed to address holes in the farm safety net, particularly for underserved commodities with low participation and coverage levels under crop insurance and for commodities without an effective safety net. This is not a criticism of crop insurance, which we support. Rather it is a recognition that there is still work to be done under crop insurance to maximize participation and coverage levels for farm and ranch families of all commodities.

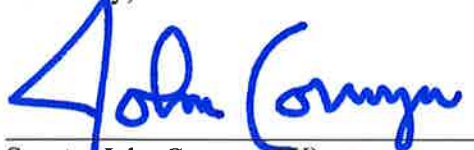
Finally, to avoid finding ourselves in this position again in the future, we urge that the supplemental direct the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation (FCIC) to make participation and coverage levels for these underserved commodities a top priority with a date certain by which FCIC must report to Congress with tangible results. We also strongly urge that the holes in the safety net for our dairy and cotton farmers be finally addressed. These producers are coping with natural disasters and a 53 percent drop in net farm income in just three years without a safety net. This situation is exacerbating the financial stress on agriculture in our states and, therefore, addressing this serious matter is a necessary part of any relief.

As you know, while agriculture may have a lower profile in our states relative to other sectors, it remains a quiet giant in driving our economies, creating jobs, and feeding America and much of the world. Our states have a strong, proud, and diverse agriculture tradition and we lead the nation in the production of many important commodities that most of us take for granted every day, including oranges, cotton, tomatoes, cattle and other livestock, a host of fruits and vegetables, dairy, greenhouse plants, sugarcane, and other row crops. A supplemental crafted to help our states recover from historic hurricane damage would be insufficient if it fails to address the needs of our farm and ranch families. Each of these needs is pressing. Many farm and ranch families are trying to secure financing right now and many should be planting within a month's time. For these families, waiting longer for help is not an option.

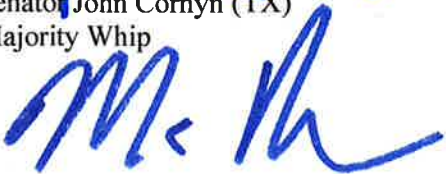
We have spent considerable time assessing the staggering losses that have been incurred and listening to farm and ranch families tell us what exactly they need to get back on their feet. We are offering carefully thought out solutions in a direct response to needs on the ground, and we are doing so in a fiscally responsible manner.

We look forward to working with you to address these critical needs before Congress breaks for Christmas.

Sincerely,



Senator John Cornyn (TX)
Majority Whip



Senator Marco Rubio (FL)



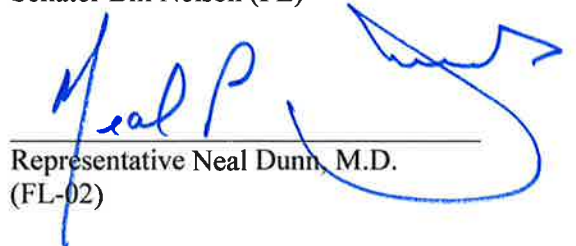
Chairman K. Michael Conaway (TX-11)
Committee on Agriculture



Senator Ted Cruz (TX)



Senator Bill Nelson (FL)



Representative Neal Dunn, M.D.
(FL-02)



Representative Henry Cuellar (TX-28)



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Representative Val Demings (FL-10)



Representative Stephanie Murphy (FL-07)



Representative Charlie Crist (FL-13)



Representative Darren Michael Soto (FL-09)



Representative Dennis Ross (FL-15)



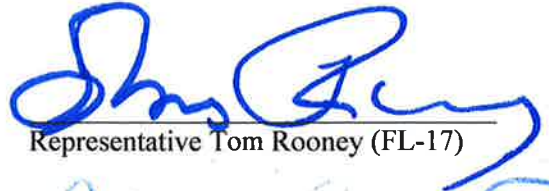
Representative Mario Diaz-Balart (FL-25)



Representative Randy Weber (TX-14)



Representative Gene Green (TX-29)



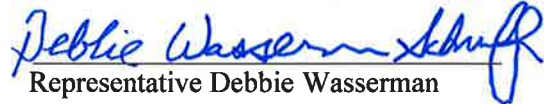
Representative Tom Rooney (FL-17)



Representative Al Lawson, Jr. (FL-05)




Representative Carlos Curbelo (FL-26)



Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz (FL-23)



Representative Lois Frankel (FL-21)



Representative Ted Yoho, D.V.M. (FL-03)



Representative Brian Babin, D.D.S. (TX-36)



Representative John Rutherford (FL-04)



Representative Vern Buchanan (FL-16)



Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (FL-27)


Representative Alcee Hastings (FL-20)


Representative Vicente Gonzalez
(TX-15)


Representative Lamar Smith (TX-21)



Representative Joaquín Castro (TX-20)



Representative Francis Rooney (FL-19)

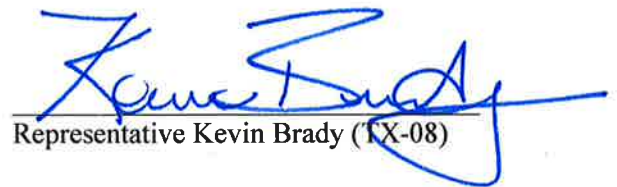

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Representative Louie Gohmert (TX-01)


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Representative Bill Posey (FL-08)


Representative John Culberson (TX-07)



Representative Kevin Brady (TX-08)


Representative Blake Farenthold
(TX-27)


Representative Ted Deutch (FL-22)


Representative Jodey Arrington (TX-19)


Representative Bill Flores (TX-17)


Representative Frederica Wilson
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Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson
(TX-30)

Joe Barton

Representative Joe Barton (TX-06)

Stacey E. Plaskett

Representative Stacey E. Plaskett
(VI-AL)

cc: The Honorable Paul Ryan, Speaker
The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Majority Leader
The Honorable Charles Schumer, Minority Leader
The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, Minority Leader