

EARL L. "BUDDY" CARTER  
First District of Georgia

ENERGY AND COMMERCE COMMITTEE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT

SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS

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April 8, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue  
Secretary of Agriculture  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave. SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

In the midst of COVID-19, food safety remains a huge concern of the U.S. consumer. While our Blueberry growers in the Southeast remain steadfast in their commitment to grow and harvest top quality, safe farm products, they are seeing a significant slowdown in the movement of fresh products in the market. A combination of continued food chain problems from retailers and the closing of restaurants, schools, and other places of business has resulted in a low point in demand. All signs point to even lower demand in the coming weeks.

During the month of April, Florida will harvest in excess of 20 million pounds with peak promotional tonnage coming the first 15 days in April. Georgia has a historical crop of fresh Blueberries of over 50 million pounds and will start peak production during the latter part of April. This domestic tonnage, along with Mexican imports, needs to move through our retail market avenues and be consumed as a safe and healthy fresh fruit. The market signals do not indicate that this will occur.

It is critical to our Southeastern Blueberry growers to move through the peak harvest period without disruption. With crops frozen out in 2017 and 2018, along with import pressure disrupting the market in 2019, our growers are now in a dire economic position.

We are thankful the Administration is moving forward with the implementation of the recently approved CARES Act. As you know, included in the CARES Act was \$9.5 billion set aside to assist specialty crop producers and other farmers and ranchers during the COVID-19 emergency. In addition, nutrition funding has been available to address the increased demand of U.S. feeding programs.

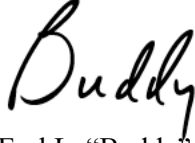
We request that you consider two areas to assist our blueberry growers in the Southeast.

1. Growers need significant fresh product purchases as soon as possible to avoid crops being lost to no available market. We ask that Southeastern Blueberries be considered for federal nutrition programs. This nutritious fruit could add to the nutrition of our nation's children while at the same time assist in stabilizing markets and help keep many of our blueberry growers on the farm.
2. Second, I ask that you consider direct payments to Blueberry growers that have lost sales or suffered other financial losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In closing, our Georgia Blueberry crop is already being harvested, and growers are considering various measures from not harvesting all of their crop to canceling worker contracts due to the lack of available buyers for this year's crop. We hope you will consider including Georgia growers in any commodity purchase

and direct payment program to producers to offset a very difficult blueberry market due to the COVID-19 emergency.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Buddy". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a large initial "B".

Earl L. "Buddy" Carter,  
Member of Congress

**The following Members of Congress have cosigned this letter:**

Senator Kelly Loeffler (GA)

Representative Sanford Bishop (GA-02)