

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

June 29, 2018

The Honorable Bill Northey
Undersecretary
Farm and Foreign Agricultural Service
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Undersecretary Northey:

We are writing to bring to your attention the severe loss suffered by Hawaii farmers due to recent disasters and ask for your assistance to the maximum extent practicable in providing resources made available within USDA programs. This includes allowing impacted farmers to sign up for crop insurance payments for the 2018 Crop Year, providing ad-hoc disaster payments to impacted farmers with the linked commitment to participate in crop insurance for the next two available crop years, and creative flexibility with the Emergency Conservation Program.

On April 13 – 16, 2018, torrential rains resulted in flooding, landslides and mudslides in the City and County of Honolulu and Kauai County. The President approved a Major Disaster Declaration for both counties (FEMA-4365-DR) and Secretary Perdue designated Kauai County as a disaster area. The flooding on Kauai destroyed at least 33 percent of the island's taro crop and the state expects a shortage of the locally consumed crop this year. According to USDA, taro grown in Hawaii was valued at nearly \$2.6 million in 2017.

Shortly after the events on Kauai and Oahu, a volcanic eruption began on Hawaii Island on May 3, 2018. The volcanic activity, which continues to this day, includes the lava flow, volcanic ash, acid rain, high levels of sulfur dioxide, and volcanic gas emissions ("vog"). The President has approved a Major Disaster Declaration for Hawaii County (FEMA-4366-DR). Thus far, lava has covered 6,164 acres and destroyed over 650 homes in the Puna area of Hawaii Island. Farms which grow or cultivate papayas, orchids, and cut flowers have been covered by lava or are no longer accessible. According to the 2012 Census of Agriculture, Hawaii Island has 83 percent of Hawaii's papaya acreage and 78 percent of Hawaii's floriculture square footage. Preliminary estimates suggest that up to 50 percent of Hawaii's cut flower industry is destroyed. Coffee and macadamia nuts are already showing the effects of acid rain and losses could be extensive.

Farmers have not just lost their farms and homes, they have been displaced from their land as the volcanic activity has permanently altered the landscape. They will need to find new parcels and start over again. It will be well over a year before they are able to harvest their first crop. For producers of orchids, it could take three to four years to reestablish the crop to production levels achieved prior to the disaster.

Hawaii is unlike any other state. The majority of our farms are small and diversified with specialty crops, and Hawaii remains an underserved state for crop insurance. For farmers who have lost their homes, their crops, their land, and their farming infrastructure valued up to millions of dollars, assistance is absolutely critical if they are to remain in agriculture.

Hawaii farmers have lost so much. If we want to ensure that they remain in agriculture and continue to provide locally grown food for our families, specialty crops that add millions to our economy, and increase Hawaii's food sustainability, we must provide them with every available assistance.

Accordingly, we ask for every consideration from the USDA to support the future of Hawaii's farming and floriculture industry. We look forward to your prompt response and thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



MAZIE K. HIRONO
U.S. Senator



BRIAN SCHATZ
U.S. Senator



M.C.

TULSI GABBARD
U.S. Representative



COLLEEN HANABUSA
U.S. Representative