



RON DESANTIS
GOVERNOR

September 8, 2023

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

On behalf of Florida's farmers and agricultural producers, I am requesting that you issue a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Disaster Declaration for counties impacted by Hurricane Idalia on August 30, 2023. I am also requesting you make any and all assistance under the Farm Service Agency and other USDA programs available to farmers to help them recover.

Last week, Hurricane Idalia brought destructive winds and storm surge across the Big Bend of Florida, harming livestock and damaging crop production, storage facilities, equipment, and farm labor housing across the area. In response, I declared a state of emergency and deployed resources from the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the Florida Division of Emergency Management to survey the destruction to this vital sector of Florida's economy. Initial reports show significant impacts to the timber industry, cattle and dairy farms, the poultry industry, peanut growers, and processing plants. In addition to crop and livestock losses, there is catastrophic loss to infrastructure. Fencing, barns, and equipment have been destroyed or rendered useless. Given these observations, we believe the flexibilities in reporting deadlines and sign-up periods for standing disaster programs are warranted where applicable.

This major hurricane follows several years of above average rainfall, severe storms and winds, other tropical cyclones, hard freezes, and the significant economic disruption to all sectors of the economy caused by supply chain issues and mounting inflationary pressures, which may hinder access to necessary resources these farmers need. Florida is a major agricultural producer and exporter, with \$7.3 billion in agricultural products sold annually as of the latest USDA agricultural census. Agriculture makes up one of the largest portions of Florida's \$1.2 trillion gross domestic product, and it is vital that this engine of our economy has the resources they need to continue to operate.

I ask that the USDA move quickly to review and respond to this request and approve all assistance programs available under the USDA and your federal counterparts. I look forward to working with your team to ensure Florida's farmers have access to all available funding during this difficult time. Please do not hesitate to contact my office for any additional information.

Sincerely,

A blue ink signature of Ron DeSantis, written in a cursive style.

Ron DeSantis
Governor