GEORGE S. LEMIEUX
FLORIDA

COMMITTEES:
ARMED SERVICES
COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510–0907

January 15, 2010

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
14th and Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

I write to you today regarding the unseasonably cold weather that swept through the Southeast earlier this month which has left many Florida farmers scrambling to make ends meet in an already difficult economic time. I urge you to give the utmost thorough and careful consideration to the disaster declaration request sent to you by Florida Governor Charlie Crist on January 15, 2010.

The agriculture industry in Florida supports thousands of hardworking jobs and produces an annual economic impact of over $87 billion dollars. Florida farmers are all too familiar with the destructive hand of nature, be it from hurricanes, the torrential rains that accompany them or simply unusually cold temperatures. However, when these forces of nature are combined with already troubling economic times, their effects are felt exponentially.

For much of the first half of January, temperatures regularly dipped well below freezing during the night across Florida, resulting in substantial crop losses across many counties. A federal disaster declaration would allow these hardworking men and women to recover a small portion of their losses, which if unmitigated could result in the closure of many family-owned and operated farms that have been passed from generation to generation.

I appreciate your leadership and support for our nation's farmers and urge your prompt and thoughtful consideration of this request. Should you require any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

Sincerely,

George S. LeMieux
United States Senator

cc: FL Governor Charlie Crist
FL DACS Commissioner Bronson