Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 31, 2018

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Secretary Perdue,

As representatives of the leading agricultural regions in the country, we support the need for free and fair trade with our international partners. However, United States specialty crops are being significantly impacted by trade tensions and resulting retaliatory tariffs from nations around the globe. Tariffs from these nations are making fruits, vegetables and tree nuts in our districts significantly more expensive than their competitors, threatening the economic livelihood of our businesses and communities.

Those we represent have to date seen annual exports of approximately $2 billion impacted by retaliatory tariffs, exports that contribute significantly to the United States' agricultural trade surplus. Our growers' highest priority for maintaining market share, which is incredibly difficult to regain if lost, is free and fair trade. That being said, if they are to be significantly impacted in the interim, we agree that mitigation assistance should be pursued. USDA programs should stabilize prices and maintain markets in order to achieve their intended purpose. In response to the recent announcement of your mitigation proposal and its expected programs and scope, we strongly urge that specialty crop farmers be given the same forethought as other tariff-impacted commodity sectors. Specifically, they should receive a share of the $12 billion mitigation funding that is adequately proportional to the damage they will face from retaliatory tariffs.

We understand that the industry has engaged with you and other USDA officials on mitigation options leading up to this announcement. We share their concerns about solely relying on a food purchase and distribution program for these extremely diverse and high-value commodities, such as tree nuts, citrus, leafy greens, berries, stone fruit, and potatoes. Additionally, any program that is focused on direct payments should be constructed in a way that can also work for the growers of these types of commodities. We also support crafting a trade promotion program that emphasizes retaining or reentering valuable markets to prevent permanent exclusion. We urge you to continue working with the specialty crop stakeholders on their recommendations to address their unique needs and industry trends.

We reiterate our support for free and fair trade that encourages the export of our country's superior agricultural products and supports hardworking farmers in our districts. We look forward to working with you on the mitigation plan as it continues to develop, and we urge that such a plan be implemented in a timely fashion for all sectors, as well as reflects the economic hardships U.S. fresh produce growers, processors, and shippers are expected to face.

Sincerely,

Jeff Denham
Member of Congress

Jim Costa
Member of Congress

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