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December 16, 2015

The Honorable Governor Nikki Haley
1205 Pendleton Street
Columbia, SC 29201

Dear Governor Haley:

I am writing today as a call for action in order to help the agricultural producers in the Lowcountry of South Carolina. Two months have passed since the historic flooding in South Carolina. During the past two months I have been working with our agricultural producers throughout the Lowcountry trying to help them recover from the floods that ruined hundreds of acres of crops. While the farmers I work with in the Lowcountry do not have the large acreage that a row crop farmer would have, our crops are just as valuable as or even more valuable than most cotton, corn, or soybean crops. The farmers here in Charleston, Beaufort, Berkeley, and Dorchester County are suffering as a result of the historic floods.

Most of the fall crop in the Lowcountry is planted from mid-August through mid-October. The rains in October could not have come at a worse time as the early planted crop was completely washed away or in some cases had to be destroyed due to food safety concerns. It was extremely difficult to tell a farmer who had most of his crop washed away that he had to mow down the marketable portion of his crop that remained. The 20+ inches of rain followed by 7 inches in the following week completely saturated our soils to the point where we could not get tractors in the field to treat, plant, or to work the soil. Some farms fared better than others while some lost everything. I initially estimated a crop loss of 75% which I believe now is somewhat of a conservative estimate. Many farms and farmers who have been farming for generations are on the brink of closing their doors for good.

Part of the charm of the Lowcountry lies within the tourism and restaurant industry. The restaurant industry is heavily reliant on the local foods movement. The local foods are produced right here in Charleston, Beaufort, Berkeley and Dorchester Counties by local people. These suppliers are economic drivers for our state's economy and are struggling to make ends meet. What happens when these local farms shut down due to lack of available funds after a natural disaster?



CHARLESTON COUNTY

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Issued in Furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914

Public Service Activities

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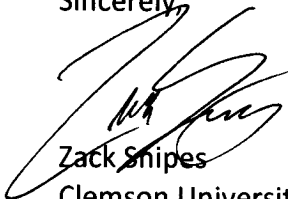
All fruit and vegetable farms depend heavily on cash flow to help their business operate. With the sudden loss of cash flow, many farms do not have capital to pay labor, plant crops, buy diesel, seeds, or fertilizer for next year's crop. Countless farms lost hardworking, reliable labor to other higher paying jobs during the month where there was no farm work to be done. These farms will never get these workers back.

Although crop insurance exists, most crop insurance is designed for the commodities such as corn, cotton, wheat, and soybeans to name a few. Vegetable producers do not have a one size fits all type crop insurance that can meet their needs. Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) is a crop insurance for vegetable growers but it is not tailored for these diversified family farms as evidenced by one grower in four counties having NAP coverage. The coverage provided by NAP is not financially beneficial to a grower and has to be purchased before the growing season. There is another insurance plan that recently came out, Whole Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP), but many growers were unaware of this new program.

The economic impact of the flooding in early October has crippled the vegetable and fruit producers in the Lowcountry. The losses experienced will be extremely difficult for the farms to overcome as the profit margins are so small on diversified operations. This unique situation is one where farmers will have to cease their operations if we do not get some type of financial assistance. **Farmers cannot simply borrow more money to solve the problems we are having. As elected officials of our great state of South Carolina, the farmers need your help now more than ever.**

I have worked countless hours filling out ESF-17 forms and photographing evidence of the flooding on each farm. I will be more than happy to share all of these damage reports, photographs and testimonials of the devastation in the counties I work. It breaks my heart to see the damage done and having to tell farmers there is nothing I can do to help them. Thank you for your time and consideration. Should you have any questions, comments or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at zbsnipe@clemson.edu or 864-934-7922.

Sincerely,



Zack Snipes

Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service
Charleston Area Horticulture Agent
Commercial Fruits and Vegetables



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