

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 21, 2016

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
The Capitol, Room S-230  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Harry Reid  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
The Capitol, Room S-221  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader McConnell and Minority Leader Reid:

Since 2005, Florida citrus growers have been fighting an uphill battle against Huanglongbing, better known as citrus greening. Originating in China, this bacterial disease has decimated Florida's iconic orange industry. An estimated eighty percent of the state's citrus trees are infected, and despite efforts from our brightest minds, a cure remains elusive.

The disease is transmitted by the Asian citrus psyllid as it feeds on a citrus trees' new leaf growth. Once inside the tree, bacteria disrupts the tree's internal flow of nutrients, starving the tree of the nutrients it needs to survive and bear healthy fruit. Trees infected by the bacteria develop shrunken roots, discolored leaves, and deformed, bitter fruit. Since its discovery in Florida in 2005, the disease has rapidly spread throughout the entire state, with disastrous effects on production in a region that is a cornerstone of the world's citrus supply. Yields and acreage have declined dramatically, and thousands of jobs have disappeared as the plague of greening chokes the citrus industry and their trees. The U.S. Department of Agriculture predicts Florida will produce only 81.1 million boxes of oranges during the 2015-2016 season, a 16-percent decline from last year's harvest. If this projection holds, this would be the smallest harvest in more than 50 years.

The citrus industry desperately needs relief, and Congress can play an important role in ensuring our growers have an incentive to keep fighting while research for a cure continues. The bipartisan and bicameral Emergency Citrus Disease Response Act would allow more citrus growers to immediately expense the cost of re-planting lost or damaged citrus trees instead of the standard 14-year depreciation period under current Internal Revenue Service rules. We must recognize that an arbitrary 14-year timeline is not helpful for growers fighting this pest. Efforts to get the Emergency Citrus Disease Response Act (S. 2346) enacted into law have been going on for almost a year. Without relief soon, there may not be any citrus groves in the United States left to save.

As you negotiate Senate consideration of upcoming tax bills, such as an end-of-year tax extenders package, we urge that you give serious consideration to citrus growers and recognize their importance to our nation by including S. 2346 in any tax legislation sent to the President.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. We look forward to working with you on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Bill Nelson in blue ink.

Bill Nelson  
United States Senator

Handwritten signature of Marco Rubio in blue ink.

Marco Rubio  
United States Senator