

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 15, 2021

The Honorable Lisa Barton  
Secretary  
U.S. International Trade Commission  
500 E Street SW  
Washington, D.C. 20436

Subject: Monitoring of Fresh or Chilled Bell Peppers, Inv. No. 332-582 (Monitoring); and  
Monitoring of Fresh or Chilled Strawberries, Inv. No. 332-581 (Monitoring)

Dear Secretary Barton:

As representatives of Florida's farming community, we write with regard to the decision made by the International Trade Commission (ITC) and federal agency partners to address concerns of increased Mexican imports of seasonal and perishable fruits and vegetables. For years, Florida growers have suffered disproportionate economic harm due to unfairly traded Mexican imports. The trading practices employed are a substantial cause of serious injury to Florida's industry, placing the future of this critical domestic food supplier and its economic contributions to the state and nation at risk.

In an effort to provide meaningful relief to U.S. fruit and vegetable producers suffering from unfair trade practices, on September 1, 2020, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) and the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Commerce issued a comprehensive Report and Plan. The interagency report revealed that "[t]he dramatic increase in U.S. imports of fresh fruits and vegetables from Mexico is undeniable. In 1993, the United States imported approximately \$1.2 billion of fresh fruits and vegetables from Mexico. By 2019, imports had increased 1,025 percent to \$13.5 billion." Pursuant to the plan, on November 3, 2020, the USTR called on the ITC to initiate investigations to monitor and investigate imports of strawberries and bell peppers, which could enable an expedited 201 global safeguard investigation under Section 202(b) of the Trade Act of 1974.

Florida produce growers have witnessed a significant influx of imports from Mexico in recent years, experiencing a 550 percent increase between 2000 and 2019. Often these imports are at or below the cost of production, resulting in \$1.89 to \$3.78 billion in total economic losses for Florida's economy. Perhaps more shocking, our state's producers have lost between \$1.1 and \$2.2 billion in sales, leading to tens of thousands of lost jobs. With the 2020/2021 season underway, growers report such practices are continuing with import prices often at a fraction of the U.S. break-even price, challenging the survival of generations of Florida farmers.

In the winter months, Florida has a legacy of providing the vast majority of domestically produced strawberries. However, due to unabated Mexican strawberry imports, Florida growers have suffered hundreds of millions of dollars in lost sales and since 2000, faced a staggering

1,654 percent expansion of Mexican berries. As the Interagency Report highlighted, “U.S. imports of strawberries from Mexico have increased from roughly \$44 million in 2001 to more than \$840 million in 2019,” eclipsing our state as the dominant strawberry supplier for our nation. Florida’s market share loss for strawberries accelerated from 2016 through 2020, as the total volume of imported strawberries from Mexico increased by 47 percent.

Similarly, the Administration’s Report noted U.S. imports of Mexican bell peppers have more than doubled from 2014 to 2019. Due to the influx of unfairly traded Mexican imports, Florida, once the dominant supplier of peppers in the U.S. markets, is down to 14 percent of market share, with Mexico commanding 73 percent of the U.S. market, resulting in significant harm to the state’s pepper producers. Florida growers’ bell pepper market share declined an astounding 57.5 percent from the 2016 to 2020 harvest season.

As the data reveals, the significant influx of imports in recent years has dramatically affected Florida’s strawberry and pepper industries. Furthermore, these unfair trade prices and Mexican government support programs have caused subsequent loss of jobs and economic capabilities. Growers need access to a level playing field in the marketplace. As the COVID-19 public health crisis has demonstrated, it is imperative we ensure a strong and sustainable food supply within our nation.

The situation is truly dire. If a solution is not provided and fair trade practices are not restored, Florida’s vital produce industries, and our ability to provide a nutritious source of domestic food supply, will be lost. We applaud the ITC and encourage your effort to work with our state’s producers and relevant agencies to monitor and investigate imports of strawberries and bell peppers to provide meaningful relief to Florida growers.

Sincerely,



Marco Rubio  
U.S. Senator



Rick Scott  
U.S. Senator



Mario Diaz-Balart  
Member of Congress



John H. Rutherford  
Member of Congress



Neal P. Dunn, M.D.  
Member of Congress



Carlos A. Gimenez  
Member of Congress



Gus M. Bilirakis  
Member of Congress



Michael Waltz  
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W. Gregory Steube  
Member of Congress



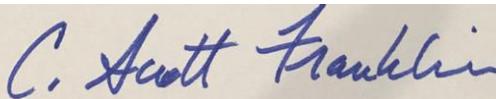
Brian Mast  
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Bill Posey  
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Scott Franklin  
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Kat Cammack  
Member of Congress



Daniel Webster  
Member of Congress



Matt Gaetz  
Member of Congress



Maria Elvira Salazar  
Member of Congress



Byron Donalds  
Member of Congress

CC: Robert Lighthizer, U.S. Trade Representative  
Wilbur Ross, Secretary of Commerce  
Sonny Perdue, Secretary of Agriculture  
Donald Trump, President of the United States