

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0908

June 8, 2021

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We write to urge you to reverse the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) April 2020 decision to allow the importation of five varieties of citrus fruits from China.

In recent years, Florida's citrus growers have suffered the impacts of hurricanes, unfairly priced imports, and from citrus greening, a disease which originated in China, and spread to the U.S. from imported citrus. Citrus greening has devastated Florida's citrus groves, decreasing our state's citrus production capacity by approximately 70 percent since 2000.

The USDA's decision continues to risk an increase in unfair trade competition by Chinese government-subsidized products and could be exposing domestic growers to a host of invasive pests and diseases. The department's April 15, 2020 notice included details of the Pest Risk Assessment (PRA) of allowing imports of these citrus products from China, including a list of species that are likely to enter the United States. The PRA identified 15 pest species of mites, fruit flies, and moths and two pathogens, including those that cause citrus canker and citrus black spot diseases, which could "cause unacceptable impacts" if they enter the U.S. via imports of these Chinese citrus products.¹ Risking the introduction of invasive species and diseases into the U.S. is irresponsible, especially given our knowledge of how citrus greening previously entered our country by imported citrus and is spread by an invasive pest species, the Asian citrus psyllid.

Notably, the original notice for the proposed rule, which was initially proposed in August 2014, stated, "there is no reason to conclude that adoption of this proposed rule would result in any significant economic effect," and predicted that likely quantities of citrus imported from China would be "relatively small."² Following the decision to allow Chinese citrus imports, the USDA estimated in a December 2020 country profile of China that Chinese exports of citrus may increase by as much as six percent this marketing year (2020-2021), and specifically cited China's access to new markets, such as the United States, as a basis for this prediction.³

¹ "Decision To Authorize the Importation of Fresh Citrus From China Into the Continental United States," April 15, 2020. <https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=APHIS-2014-0005-0049>

² <https://www.regulations.gov/document/APHIS-2014-0005-0001>

³ https://apps.fas.usda.gov/newgainapi/api/Report/DownloadReportByFileName?fileName=Citrus%20Annual_Beijing_China%20-%20Peoples%20Republic%20of_12-15-2020

Meanwhile, in an August 2020 report which summarized American citrus production, the USDA noted that the 2019-2020 marketing season had yielded a four percent year-over-year decrease in the volume of U.S.-produced citrus, and a six percent decrease in the volume of citrus produced in Florida.⁴ Considering China's well-known predatory industrial practices, it should have been abundantly clear that allowing subsidized citrus products into the U.S. from China would lead to notable import volumes that would detrimentally impact American citrus producers. Additionally, because import volumes of Chinese citrus are likely larger than what was expected by the USDA, we are concerned that larger-than-expected import volumes could increase the risk that invasive pests and diseases could be introduced into American citrus groves.

The federal government and the State of Florida have invested hundreds of millions of dollars to research citrus greening and to slow its spread and find a cure. Continuing to allow citrus imports from China could further harm Florida's citrus growers and risks undermining the progress that has been made through these investments.

We respectfully urge you to reconsider this decision.

Sincerely,



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



Rick Scott
U.S. Senator

⁴ https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/Todays_Reports/reports/cfrr0820.pdf