

Citrus Industry Groups Provide Context of COVID-19 Damage to USDA

In a letter addressed to U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue, three citrus industry groups have outlined the type of impact that COVID-19 is having on citrus. California Citrus Mutual (CCM), Texas Citrus Mutual, and Florida Citrus Mutual provided insight on the damage created by coronavirus as decisions are being made as to how to disperse funding for relief aid for the agricultural sector.

“We thought it’d be helpful for USDA and also our congressional delegation to have some specifics on what we’re seeing within the citrus industry today because they’re trying to put together a program with limited funds that’s very complex,” said CCM President and CEO Casey Creamer. “We know USDA has a tough job ahead of them and we want to be as helpful as we possibly could as they begin to roll out this program.”

Lemons appear to have taken the biggest hit since the beginning of the shelter in place orders, with losses in revenues for growers between \$4 million to \$5 million per week. The closure of schools, restaurants and other retail outlets have also resulted in a dramatic decline in sales of grapefruit and grapefruit juice. The market has also become exceptionally volatile for other varieties of citrus. Although still early on, the projection for losses by the end of the season are in the \$200 million range.

“We’ve seen drop off in some of our specialty varieties like blood oranges, Cara Cara navels, gold nuggets, to name a few,” Creamer explained. “We’re seeing trends that are not good in some of our other specialty varieties. It’s just an unprecedented situation and so we’re trying to stay on top of it and provide accurate and credible information to decision-makers.”

While the letter was primarily meant to provide detailed information about how citrus is being affected during the pandemic, the citrus industry groups did make some suggestions for assisting citrus growers. The group encourages direct payments as the best option





for relief and requests that adjusted gross income and other payment limitations not be applied to the relief program. “If there was payment limitations or adjusted gross income limitations you may be able to get a little bit of aid but it still puts you out of business,” Creamer noted.

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