

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510



March 5, 2007

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to follow up on our February 2nd requests for a federal disaster declaration in counties that were devastated by the January agricultural freeze in California and urge you to immediately grant the declaration. The unprecedented freezing temperatures in California destroyed \$1.323 billion in crops and left thousands of citrus industry workers unemployed. It has been over a month since our initial request, and as the State continues to wait for your decision, more and more farm workers and their families are struggling every day to deal with the ongoing impacts of the freeze on their lives.

On February 2nd, Governor Schwarzenegger requested that you provide federal disaster assistance for the impacted workers in the form of Disaster Unemployment Assistance, Food Coupons and Distribution, Crisis Counseling, and Legal Services. The same day Senators Boxer and Feinstein echoed the Governor's call for an immediate federal disaster declaration.

The State has already provided a significant amount of assistance to the thousands affected by the freeze. The Office of Emergency Services established twenty "One-Stop" assistance centers throughout the state, and provided over \$2 million in funding to local food banks and \$1.75 million in emergency funding for rent, mortgage, and utility assistance, among many other outreach and assistance initiatives. In addition, local food banks, churches, and community centers throughout California have mobilized to help community members deal with the disaster.

State and local groups can only provide so much assistance during disasters, and it is the responsibility of the federal government to help shoulder the burden in times of

crisis. The urgency of the need for federal assistance to help these farm workers and their families cannot be underestimated. Francisco Torres, a 26-year veteran citrus worker whose son is serving in Iraq tells of how his fellow citrus workers are struggling to pay the rent because there is not enough work, and citrus grower Marc McBroom has had to lay off 120 of his harvesters because of the freeze.

As these stories show, agriculture workers and their families are integral members of their local communities, and the federal government must act immediately to help them during this time of crisis.

It is our understanding that last week Department of Homeland Security Secretary Chertoff gave you the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) certification of California's eligibility for disaster assistance. Your signature is the last hurdle to clear before federal assistance can begin flowing to the thousands of workers and their families whose livelihoods have been devastated by the freeze.

We urge you to immediately declare a federal disaster in the 31 California counties impacted by the freeze and to task the appropriate federal agencies to do all that is necessary to deal with its tragic impacts. Please be assured we will do all we can to move Congress to guarantee that the federal government provides the necessary resources to our impacted citizens.

Sincerely,



Barbara Boxer
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Arnold Schwarzenegger
Governor of California