

Washington, DC (January 19, 2011) – Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-Fla.) joined members of Florida’s Congressional delegation to support the state’s request for a disaster declaration from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (U.S.D.A.) following the severe weather conditions of the past several months that destroyed crops across the state.

“This past December was one of the coldest in Florida’s history with consecutive days of sustained hours of temperatures below freezing. The extreme weather caused significant crop loss and damage across our state,” members of the delegation wrote to U.S.D.A. Secretary Tom Vilsack.

Gus was joined by Florida Senators Bill Nelson and Marco Rubio, and Reps. Jeff Miller (FL-1), Steve Sutherland (FL-2), Corrine Brown (FL-3), Ander Crenshaw (FL-4), Rich Nugent (FL-5), Cliff Stearns (FL-6), John Mica (FL-7), Daniel Webster (FL-8), Bill Young (FL-10), Dennis Ross (FL-12), Vern Buchanan (FL-13), Connie Mack (FL-14), Bill Posey (FL-15), Tom Rooney (FL-16), Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (FL-18), Ted Deutch (FL-19), Debbie Wasserman-Schultz (FL-20), Mario Diaz-Balart (FL-21), Allen West (FL-22), Alcee Hastings (FL-23), Sandra Adams (FL-24), and David Rivera (FL-25).

The full text of the letter is below:

*Dear Secretary Vilsack:*

*We are writing today in strong support of the State of Florida’s December 30, 2010 request for a primary county disaster declaration in response to damage caused by the severe weather conditions over the past several months. In total, the state requested a disaster declaration for thirty-six (36) counties which have suffered from freeze, frost, high wind and drought damage.*

*This past December was one of the coldest in Florida’s recorded history with consecutive days of sustained hours of temperatures below freezing. The extreme weather caused significant crop loss and damage across our state. Citrus, tomatoes, nursery crops, strawberries, green peppers, tropical fish, sweet corn, and green beans are just some of the crops that were either*

*lost or damaged. As the state's request pointed out, this weather event has affected both the 2010 and 2011 crop years. Adding to the cold weather damage, some counties were already experiencing drought conditions in the preceding months.*

*Former Governor Crist and Former Agriculture Commissioner Bronson and current Agriculture Commissioner Putnam corroborated the losses with the USDA's Farm Services Agency (FSA) in Florida, and they agree that the widespread damage meets the required threshold and necessitates a disaster declaration for the listed counties.*

*With this information in mind, we hope you will expedite Florida's request for a disaster declaration so our agriculture community can begin the long road to recovery from the devastating weather conditions. Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to working with you throughout this process.*