

Rep. Bilirakis Urges Primary Disaster Declaration for Hillsborough

WASHINGTON (28 Mar.) – Following a wave of freezing cold temperatures in early January that damaged crops in Hillsborough County, Florida Congressmen Gus M. Bilirakis (R-Palm Harbor) and Adam Putnam (R-Bartow) sent a letter on Wednesday to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Ed Schafer urging him to declare Hillsborough County a primary disaster.

On January 3, 2008, Rep. Bilirakis discusses crop damage with Kristen Hitchcock of Parkesdale Farms in Plant City, Fla.

Such a declaration would make the affected agriculture producers eligible to apply for any existing or future federal disaster assistance.

In the letter, Bilirakis and Putnam highlighted the extent of the damage wrought by the freezing temperatures in Hillsborough County and urged federal action:

“Strawberries and tropical fish sustained significant damage. The freeze caused a 30% loss to the strawberry crop and losses to tropical fish farms range from 30%-90% in Hillsborough County,” the letter said. “Therefore, we respectfully urge a primary disaster declaration for Hillsborough County so the affected producers may be eligible for any disaster assistance that is currently available or will be available in the future.”

On January 3, 2008, Congressman Bilirakis traveled to Parkesdale Farms in Plant City, Fla., to survey the damage caused by the freeze (see "Gus Visits with Farmers Affected by Freezing Temperatures").

“In January, I viewed the extent of the crop damage caused by the freezing temperatures. It was significant,” said Bilirakis. “The Federal government must now act to ensure that those producers whose livelihoods were affected by the freezing temperatures are eligible for any federal assistance available now or in the future.”