



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES
COMMISSIONER NICOLE “NIKKI” FRIED
THE CAPITOL

**Statement of the Honorable Nicole “Nikki” Fried
U.S. International Trade Commission
Hearing on General Factfinding Investigations:
Cucumbers/Squash: Effects of Imports on U.S. Seasonal Markets,
with a Focus on the U.S. Southeast (Inv. No. 332-583 and Inv. No. 332-584)**

April 8, 2021

Chairman Kearns and fellow commissioners, I thank the U.S. International Trade Commission for holding this hearing as part of your factfinding investigations into the unfair trade practices being employed by Mexico and other foreign countries resulting in a surge of seasonal produce imports that have caused serious harm to our domestic producers for decades, devastation that continues still today. I also thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak today, as Florida’s Commissioner of Agriculture, on behalf of our state’s \$90.9 million cucumber industry and \$35.4 million squash industry that unfortunately are no exception when it comes to being injured by the surge of imports.

Along with my testimony, I am providing the ITC with two reports produced by my Division of Marketing and Development at the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, which provide hard data showing the economic fallout that has wreaked havoc on Florida and other domestic seasonal producers while these unfair foreign trade practices have continued to go unchecked. Specifically, we have seen at least twenty commodities impacted in the last two decades. While I hope you will review these reports thoroughly, I wanted to share some of the key findings here today, starting with the report on cucumbers and its impact on Florida producers.

In 2000, Florida produced 230.5 million pounds of cucumbers, which accounted for 19 percent of the U.S. market at that time. Yet, despite a demand increase of 75 percent for fresh and chilled cucumbers in the U.S. market between 2000 and 2020, Florida saw its production volume decrease by 61 percent to just 88.9 million pounds and our market share decrease even further – down from 78 percent to just 4.17 percent. It clearly is not a lack of domestic demand driving these losses. Instead, we found that Mexico increased both its volume and market share in the U.S. during that same time period. Starting at 53 percent of the market, with a volume of 647 million pounds in 2000, their market share increased to 71.11 percent twenty years later with a shipment weight of 1.5 billion pounds – representing an astronomical 134 percent increase.

Unfortunately, Florida is not alone in feeling the economic repercussions of Mexican imports displacing domestic products, with both Georgia and Michigan experiencing a 35 percent decrease in their cucumber shipment weights over the past two decades.

For Florida’s squash industry, the outlook is even more dire as we have seen the total weight of squash shipping into or within the U.S. increase by 120 percent between 2000 and 2020. Of this 626-million-pound increase, 91 percent is accounted for by greater imports from Mexico alone. Once again, the argument that the devastation being felt among Florida’s producers is being caused by increased domestic competition is proven to be simply not true. As these unfair trade practices are allowed to continue with no protections or remedies within reach for our domestic producers, we continue to see the harm spread to other states. Once again, we looked at Georgia’s squash industry in this report and found that between 2015 and 2020, the year-round market share for Georgia squash growers decreased by 83.9 percent.

The economic impact of these losses is hard felt and widespread. With an estimated \$382 million in lost cash receipts for squash in Florida from 2015 to 2019, it is the equivalent of 1,222 fewer jobs supported and an overall negative economic impact of \$756 million. For our cucumber industry, the estimated \$562 million in lost cash receipts between 2015 and 2020 due to displacement by imported products equates to 1,499 less jobs supported and an overall negative economic impact of \$1.11 billion. That's billion with a B, and that's over 2,500 jobs lost altogether.

I want to say that again: over 2,500 good-paying jobs in our communities lost, family farms shutting down, and parents struggling to provide for their children. The human toll is too often secondary to the economic data. But today you will see and hear from the American farmers who work hard every day to keep our food system safe and secure while their worlds are being turned upside down from decades of inaction as these harmful practices continue to increase. I hope you truly see them today, hear their hardship, and know that we can and must do better by them.

Unfortunately, we have seen that for too long the irrefutable data showing the market distortions, unfair pricing, and other unfair practices have not been enough to move the needle on this issue. The heartbreak and losses felt by our neighbors who have lost jobs, livelihoods, and family farms, while continuing to suffer has not been enough. The last time I was here before you, I testified virtually on behalf of our state's \$62.3 million blueberry industry. At that January hearing we also provided overwhelming evidence and data to support our case. Farmers from Florida and across the U.S. testified on the personal hardships they have experienced while Mexico's blueberry market share in the U.S. increased over 2,000 percent since 2009. While the ruling in that case was extremely disappointing, it speaks to the need for reform in the underlying structure that denies equal access to our nation's trade remedies for our seasonal producers. It is my hope that while the ITC continues to uncover the devastating impact that increased imports are inflicting upon our domestic cucumber and squash industries, along with your ongoing monitoring of fresh strawberry and bell pepper imports, you will employ all tools at your disposal to provide equity and fairness for American farmers.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak on this urgent issue for seasonal producers in Florida and across the U.S. Please know that the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services stands ready to assist our federal partners as we continue to fight for the level playing field our farmers deserve and need to survive.