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January 19, 2017

Members of the Lee County Legislative Delegation.....

For the record, my name is Ron Hamel and I am executive vice president of the Gulf Citrus Growers Association. The association represents citrus growers in the Southwest Florida counties of Charlotte, Collier, Glades, Hendry and Lee. The "Gulf Citrus" region represents over 25% of Florida's multi-billion citrus industry! Thank you for your leadership and for providing this opportunity to speak.

First, I would like to thank the "delegation" for supporting last year's "General Revenue" request to fund "RESEARCH" to fight the deadly "citrus greening" disease that is plaguing our industry! These STATE funds are being combined with "grower" and "federal" dollars to battle the disease! As you are aware, we have been "fighting" HLB/greening since 2005...and although research scientists have not yet found the so-called "**silver bullet**"...I am pleased to report that progress IS being made particularly here in our region! Again...WE thank you for your support of last year's "**GR**" request, which was included in Agriculture Commissioner Adam Putnam's budget!

However, as you are aware...our “battle” against ‘greening’ is not over! And the future of Florida’s “signature” citrus crop...and, the thousands of jobs it provides...remains at very high risk! Although our industry leadership is still developing its list of legislative priorities... we do know that the need for **STATE** “general revenue” funding to continue our “aggressive” research and “innovative” field testing against “greening” remains the **Florida citrus industry’s NUMBER #1 priority!**

We are “respectfully requesting” your support of \$8-million in “general revenue” appropriations through the FDACS’ budget to continue “greening” research. These funds would continue to be invested through the Citrus Research Development Foundation (CRDF), the organization which is leading our industry’s research efforts. Our industry leaders are also in the process of working with Commissioner Putnam’s office to determine the amount of “GR” funding needed to continue to support the Citrus Health Management Area (CHMA) program, as well as to expand the program to remove acres of “abandoned” citrus groves, which serve as breeding grounds for the citrus psyllid, the tiny insect which vectors/spreads the disease!

UF/IFAS & Southwest Florida Research & Education Center Funding

The Gulf Citrus Growers Association is also strongly supporting the University of Florida/Institute for Food and Agricultural Sciences’ Legislative Budget Request, which includes \$1-million in “non-recurring” funding for the Southwest Florida Research and Education Center (SWFREC) in Immokalee! These funds will help to renovate the

center's experimental farm fields which are vital to the "progressive" research and education efforts at the Center.

We also "respectfully request" that all Southwest Florida Legislative Delegations support UF/IFAS' "Workforce Adjustment" request of \$4-million. These funds are need statewide to bring IFAS' service capabilities to levels needed to support the sustainability of agriculture in our rapidly urbanizing state!

As you are aware, Southwest Florida farmers, ranchers and growers generate nearly \$1.4 billion in "Farm-Gate" sales...and over \$8-billion in "total" annual economic impact! The SWFREC is extremely important to the success of our region's citrus and other agricultural commodities! S.W. Florida AG is unique! And the scientific research needs to sustain its agricultural productivity are largely contingent upon the research and extension that is conducted at the Center in Immokalee.

Again..."thank you" for your leadership and continual support for SW Florida's agricultural producers! We "respectfully request" your assistance during the upcoming legislative session.



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November 16, 2016

The Honorable Matt Caldwell, Chairman
Lee County Legislative Delegation

Dear Representative Caldwell:

This letter is to respectfully request to be put on the agenda to make general remarks to the Lee County Legislative Delegation at its meeting scheduled for January 19, 2017 in Ft. Myers. As the executive vice president of the Gulf Citrus Growers Association, I plan to discuss the needs of Florida's citrus industry as related to the continual fight against the devastating "greening" bacterial disease.

I also plan to comment on the continual enhancement of the Southwest Florida Research and Education Center in Immokalee, and the related funding that is being requested as part of the UF/IFAS Legislative Budget Request. And, in addition, other needs for the Center for consideration during the 2017 Legislative session.

Thank you in advance for adding me to the Lee County Legislative Delegation agenda for the January 19th meeting.

Sincerely;

Ron Hamel, executive vice president
Gulf Citrus Growers Association

CC: Board of Directors