

Thank you, Chair Murray and Vice Chair Collins, for the opportunity to brief the Committee on the dire conditions facing Georgia farmers in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene and the urgency of passing this disaster supplemental before year's end.

Let me be clear: Georgia agriculture was devastated by this storm, and I respectfully urge the Committee and the Congress to swiftly pass agricultural disaster assistance for these farmers, who are the backbone of Georgia's rural communities and our State's economy. Georgia's farmers and rural communities are reeling and cannot afford delay.

As you know, Hurricane Helene made landfall in Florida as a Category 4 hurricane and swiftly entered Georgia, where hurricane-force winds and torrential rains destroyed fall crops still in the field, blew over row crops, knocked down pecan orchards growers spent decades cultivating, and damaged hundreds of thousands of acres of timberland. Agriculture in South Carolina, North Carolina, Kentucky, and Tennessee also suffered severe damage from this storm, and I know my colleague from North Carolina, Senator Tillis, will testify to the uniquely horrific damage suffered by his constituents in North Carolina. In addition to agricultural devastation, Georgia suffered severe damage to the power grid, businesses, housing, roads, and other critical infrastructure.

As we sit here today, Georgia growers are considering heart-wrenching decisions about whether they will be able to sustain multi-generation family farms, whether they will be able to continue providing Georgia-grown produce to our Nation and the world.

I would respectfully remind the Committee that food security is a national security issue, and the collapse of our family farming economy would have a devastating impact not just on Georgia's rural communities but on our entire Nation's capacity to sustain itself.

Moreover, the losses I have described are only those attributable to Hurricane Helene and do not include Tropical Storm Debby, Hurricane Idalia, and other natural disasters including the March 2023 freeze that devastated Georgia's flagship peach crop.

The Office of Management and Budget has requested that Congress appropriate substantial agricultural assistance as part of our broader disaster supplemental, and on behalf of my constituents, I respectfully urge the Committee to appropriate no less than the full amount requested by OMB to help Georgia growers and support Georgia farmers and the rural Georgia communities who rely upon agriculture every single day.