

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 5, 2018

Dr. Robert Johansson
Acting Deputy Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Dr. Johansson,

The Central Valley of California is home to a significant percentage of US pistachio production, with thousands of acres of planted trees across several counties. Pistachio production has boomed in the last decade, but the industry recently experienced huge losses with the introduction of a new disease known as Pistachio Bushy Top Syndrome (PBTS). Although still in need of further scientific analysis, PBTS resulted in the removal of at least 30,000 acres of planted trees and led to the closure of several nurseries.

Several smaller pistachio growers across the Central Valley have submitted applications for the Farm Service Agency's Tree Assistance Program (TAP). While many pistachio growers exceed the adjusted gross income and acreage limits required for TAP eligibility, there are a number of small growers who may qualify for assistance. However, PBTS has not been declared a natural disaster by FSA for purposes of TAP eligibility. The FSA guidelines for disaster declaration are broad, meaning it is unclear what factors are considered when rendering an eligibility decision. We are seeking clarification from your office on the circumstances FSA considers when determining whether a disease is considered a natural disaster for the purposes of TAP eligibility.

We look forward to hearing from you on this important issue.

Sincerely,



Devin Nunes
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



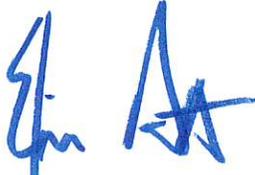
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Cc: Steven Peterson, Acting FSA Administrator
Aubrey Bettencourt, California State FSA Director