



251 Hwy 258  
Judsonia, AR 72081  
501-729-3361 Fax  
501-729-0042 Office  
[www.gillamfarms.com](http://www.gillamfarms.com)  
[gillamfarms@aol.com](mailto:gillamfarms@aol.com)

Senator Blanche Lincoln  
Chairman U.S. Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee  
Washington, D.C. 20510-2035

Dear Madam Chairman,

I appreciate this opportunity to speak to you today on behalf of the Fruit & Vegetable producers of Arkansas. This has been a very interesting and challenging year for agriculture and rural communities in Arkansas. Even though we face trials and hardships every year, this has been an especially difficult year for most. Many of us are still recovering from the Easter freeze of 2007 and now have had to deal with another freeze and massive amounts of rainfall in 2009.

I am a blackberry and muscadine grape producer located in the north central part of the state. We have experienced the same unfortunate weather as my friends and colleagues have this year. My farm has received more than two feet of rainfall above our normal amounts. We started our harvest this year in near drought conditions and finished in flood conditions. This has not only caused many problems with harvesting crops, but has also placed a strain on our rural infrastructure. Many of our roads that we use for our daily lives have been damaged by the excessive rainfall.

The impact on the horticulture or specialty crop sector has also been significant. Our industry, as you know, is very dependent upon weather. The extremes that we experienced this year with our weather has had a domino effect on not only our business but also our daily lives. The losses to our livelihood would have been bad enough but the impact that the weather, specifically the rain, has had on our communities must also be taken into account. One such example is the loss of our pumpkin crops this year. Our pumpkin growers in the state had most of their crops rot in the fields due to the rain. This in turn impacted many of our states fall festivities including pumpkin patches. Not only did this directly impact the agri-tourism industry but it also impacted our communities who did not get to enjoy these cultural events.

Many of our growers that suffered crop losses this year will also have losses next year as well. The late spring freeze that affected many in our state caused whole plantings to be lost. The cost of replanting may keep some of that acreage from being replaced for the foreseeable future. Phytophthora root rot has affected nearly every grower in the state. The volume of rain was more than even the best ground could take. Peach growers are reporting losses between ten percent and fifteen percent of their orchards due to this disease, which is caused by excessive moisture in the ground. My farm has lost five percent of our blackberry plants. The presence and increased likelihood of this disease has caused growers, including myself, to have to spray more than usual to keep our crops healthy. The additional fungicide applications cost more money which is



251 Hwy 258  
Judsonia, AR 72081  
501-729-3361 Fax  
501-729-0042 Office  
[www.gillamfarms.com](http://www.gillamfarms.com)  
[gillamfarms@aol.com](mailto:gillamfarms@aol.com)

compounded by the fact that we don't have as much to spend because of the decreased harvest brought on by the rainfall. Root rot creates long term harm to perennial crops. This means we have less money to replant with.

This is just one of the input costs that has increased, and when you factor in the decrease in revenue with all of the other input costs that continue to rise, our industry is placed in a very bad position. Gauging the extent of the damage is made more difficult by the timing and lack of reporting services for fruit and vegetable growers. We will not know just how severe the damage is until the statistical services issue their reports.

I believe that the weather circumstances that have occurred this year highlight the need for better access to, and improved crop insurance for fruit and vegetable growers. The year that we have all experienced will severely alter the base yields that will be used to calculate next year's payouts. If something were to happen next year the insurance companies would pay out much less than they normally would. For those farmers who are able to obtain insurance, this will have a significant effect on their future. It is my sincere hope that our experiences here in Arkansas will help to shed light on the need that all specialty crop growers have for better crop insurance.

In closing, I would like to thank you again for the opportunity to share with you our experiences as fruit and vegetable growers here in Arkansas. I hope that my information will be helpful to the committee in all of your future endeavors. Your interest in our industry is very much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Gillam  
Gillam Farms