

Chairman Carlos Curbelo
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Energy and Trade
Committee on Small Business
“Squeezed: Current Challenges for Small Citrus Operations”
June 11, 2015

Good morning. I call this hearing to order.

This is my first hearing as Chairman of the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Energy and Trade, and I look forward to working with Ranking Member Meng on issues of concern to small businesses.

The United States is one of the top producers of citrus in the world. Florida, my home state, is the largest producing area, followed by California, Texas, and Arizona. Within these states, citrus is both economically and culturally significant. It fuels the economy and for many growers and their families, it is a way of life, passed down from one generation to another.

Citrus is a valuable United States crop. For the 2013-2014 season, its value was \$3.39 billion, and a recent University of Florida study found that the total economic impact of the citrus industry in the state of Florida for fiscal year 2012-2013 was \$10.68 billion. However, this United States economic powerhouse is facing significant challenges. The acreage and production of citrus are down, particularly in Florida, which is ground zero for a deadly bacterial disease that destroys citrus trees.

Huanglongbing, which is also referred to as HLB or citrus greening, is a devastating citrus disease that has been found in Florida, Texas and California. In addition, the insect that spreads HLB has been found in 15 states and United States territories. HLB, along with other current challenges – in particular the Mexican fruit fly in Texas and the drought in California – are making it more difficult and costly to produce citrus. Faced with these challenges, small citrus growers, which comprise 90 percent of citrus farms, and other small businesses in the citrus industry are struggling to stay profitable and stay in business.

Today, we will be hearing from witnesses from Florida, California, and Texas who will explain how the current challenges are affecting small citrus growers and other businesses within the citrus industries in their states. I want to thank all the witnesses for taking time away from their businesses and families and for appearing before the Committee today.

With that, I yield to the Ranking Member for her opening statement.