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USDA: \$200 million for Florida agriculture hurt by hurricanes

Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. - The U.S. Department of Agriculture has designated at least \$200 million for Florida growers and farmers who suffered losses from the 2005 hurricanes, officials said Wednesday.

The funds were included in last week's budget legislation, said John Hambel, chief of staff for U.S. Rep. Adam Putnam, R-Fla.

The funding, authorized under a portion of the Agricultural Adjustment Act known as "Section 32," gives the Department of Agriculture the discretion to pay agriculture producers compensation for losses from weather and reduced market prices.

Last year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture paid Florida growers about \$600 million as compensation for their losses from Hurricanes Charley, Frances, Ivan and Jeanne.

This is the first year that nursery growers will be able to receive the Section 32 funds.

"For the first time, we've got nursery growers who sustained a lot of losses down in South Florida can get some funds," Hambel said.

Hurricanes made 2005 one of the worst years in recent memory for Florida agriculture. Four storms that struck the state caused an estimated \$2.2 billion in damage to the state's crops and farming infrastructure.

The four hurricanes caused estimated damages of \$1.1 billion to the state's nursery and foliage industry, \$370 million to the sugar sector, \$180 million to citrus and \$44.1 million to tropical fruit, according to the Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association.