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## FLORIDA

# Farm damage reaches \$2.2B for 2005 storms

**Agricultural damage caused this year's spate of hurricanes exceeds the \$2.1 billion in damages caused by last year's storms.**

BY Susan Salisbury

Palm Beach Post

Florida agriculture took a \$2.2 billion hit from the four hurricanes of 2005, the state said Friday.

That figure slightly exceeds the total of \$2.1 billion in damage suffered by the state's agriculture sector in 2004's quartet of hurricanes, but for some industries -- nurseries, sugar cane and vegetables -- Hurricanes Dennis, Katrina, Rita and Wilma have been worse this year.

Sugar-cane damage, for instance, won't be known until it is harvested and the yield is determined, but it's pegged at more than \$370 million.

"This is the worst hit the Florida sugar industry has ever had in the form of a natural disaster," said Barbara Miedema, spokeswoman for the Sugar Cane Growers Cooperative of Florida in Belle Glade. "It's devastating, and especially back-to-back years."

On Monday, state Agriculture Commissioner Charles Bronson and a group of farm industry leaders will travel to Washington, D.C., to meet with the Florida delegation, said Terry McElroy, spokesman for the Florida Department of Agriculture.

Following 2004's hurricanes, Florida agriculture received more than \$500 million in compensation.

The agriculture group will ask that funds for Rita and Wilma relief be folded into a pending bill seeking compensation for damage caused by Hurricane Katrina, which devastated the Gulf Coast states of Louisiana and Mississippi.

The biggest dollar amount of damage this year was incurred by the state's ornamental horticulture industry, at \$1.1 billion.

That compares to about \$700 million worth of storm damage in 2004, said Ben Bolusky, executive vice president of the Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association in Orlando.