COMMONWEALTH OF PUERTO RICO
PUERTO RICO FEDERAL AFFAIRS ADMINISTRATION

September 16, 2013

The Honorable Frank D. Lucas
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Lucas:

I write to you today on behalf of the Governor of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico regarding Section 4024 of H.R. 1947, the Federal Agricultural Reform and Risk Management Act of 2013. Said provision relates to the Nutrition Assistance Program (PAN), a block grant administered in association with the U.S. Department of Agriculture for eligible recipients in Puerto Rico. As the House of Representatives continues to work through proposals to reauthorize nutrition assistance programs, I urge you to prevent this provision from being enacted.

Specifically, Section 4024 eliminates the 25% cash allotment of the total amount received by beneficiaries of the grant program. Unlike in the continental United States, many beneficiaries in Puerto Rico purchase food from cash-only vendors who do not have access to an electronic system. Many of Puerto Rico's municipalities are small rural areas without access to urban grocers. Recipients in these areas turn to "plazas del mercado", traditional marketplaces, in order to purchase their food. These grocers often lack the capacity to acquire the technology to receive electronic payments – making the cash disbursements a necessity.

In addition, much of the produce sold by rural vendors to PAN recipients is locally sourced. Hence, not only are these food items healthy, they provide economic opportunity for local farmers that would otherwise be very difficult to attain.

I appreciate your efforts to pass a comprehensive Farm bill reauthorization through the House of Representatives. Given the primacy of PAN to the livelihood of rural communities in Puerto Rico, I respectfully request that provisions relating to the cash disbursement portion of the program remain out of future versions of the legislation.

Cordially Yours,

Juan E. Hernández
Executive Director

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