



Chilean and American Chamber of Commerce
of Greater Philadelphia



An open letter to the American People from the Friends of Chile

What happened in Chile matters here. On Feb. 27, one of the strongest earthquakes ever recorded took the lives of nearly 1000 Chileans and caused \$30 billion in damage to Chilean roads and ports. Most of that damage was concentrated in the central and south of Chile at the peak of the Chilean fruit harvest. Over 200 powerful aftershocks, with more to come, have continued to rock the country.

As usual, the American government and people responded immediately. President Obama offered U.S. resources to help in the rescue and recovery efforts. Secretary of State Clinton touched down in Santiago a few days later and reiterated President Obama's pledge to extend a helping hand once a request had been made by the Chilean people. Both the Senate and the House passed resolutions endorsing the President's pledge of assistance.

You, the American people, did not wait for an official request. Many of you opened your hearts and your checkbooks by making generous contributions to international organizations like the Red Cross. The people of California, who have an unusually strong trade and cultural relationship with Chile and who also understand earthquakes, were especially generous. For all of the generosity of the American people, financial and spiritual, the people of Chile are grateful.

Ports in southern California and the Delaware River region on the east coast have been involved in bringing fresh fruit from Chile to the United States from December through April of each year. Chile is the largest supplier of fresh fruit during those months before any fresh fruit is available from Mexico and Southern California.

A broad coalition of companies, civic organizations and port authorities from across the country – joined by the International Longshoreman's Association and supported by Wal-Mart, Costco and other major grocery stores -- petitioned U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack to suspend for up to 20 days in April trade restrictions on all table grapes imported from Chile. This is a way of helping the independent and resourceful people of Chile help themselves, a hand up instead of a hand out.

And it helps the American consumer as well. If the trade restrictions stay in place, the supply of fruit from Chile will end well before fresh fruit is available from other places. You may have noticed the effect at your grocery store where prices for table grapes are already 50 to 75 percent higher than last year at this time. Those prices will go even higher as the supply is cut off.

The effect on the relatively poorer Chileans – about 300,000 workers – who were hit hardest by the quake will be even more severe. They depend on the fruit harvest and its export to the

United States for their livelihood and to get back on their feet. A proud people, they would much prefer to get a helping hand than a hand out.

We ask the American people to join us to help the people of Chile help themselves. If you agree with us, e-mail the United States Department of Agriculture at Karen.S.Ross@usda.gov or Ed.Avalos@usda.gov and send a copy to your Congressman.

THIS MATTER IS URGENT. USDA NEEDS TO MAKE ITS DECISION NOW IF THE CHILEAN HARVEST IS TO BE SAVED.

To see the Petition and the entire list of supporters go to www.chileanfreshfruit.org or www.caccgp.com.