

Navigating The Challenges Of Florida's Timber Industry By Rep. Kat Cammack (R-FL-03)

As the lone Florida Republican on the House Agriculture Committee, I have traveled across our district and great state to meet with producers to better understand their challenges and unique needs. Agriculture contributes a significant amount to Florida's GDP—Florida's number one economic driver in 2020, in fact—and I'm committed to ensuring our producers benefit from a strong domestic supply chain and a thriving economy.

The forest products supply chain is interconnected among landowners, loggers, haulers, and manufacturers. To keep our forests healthy and productive, it is critical that the entire wood supply chain remains viable. Loggers and truckers are the supply chain links that connect the tracks to the mill. If these two links in the supply chain are not healthy, it is difficult for any other sector to remain healthy for an extended time. This relationship along with labor shortages and inflation have increased the strain on the forestry industry in its entirety over the last year.

Input costs continue to rise, specifically insurance costs and diesel for truckers. Insurance costs are significantly higher for log trucks in Florida than other states. As rising fuel costs take a toll on the people who harvest and move wood products, the need for sensible solutions only grows. Florida's average diesel price climbed from \$3.950 to \$5.172 in 30 days. The inflation loggers and truckers are facing far exceeds the average rise in costs for American consumers and the timber industry is feeling this pain.

The supply chain has also become challenged by a lack of labor. Like many industries, labor is proving difficult to find in multiple areas. The shortage of truck drivers has been growing for over a decade and while we've seen it fluctuate at times, it has remained ever present. Due to COVID-19, demand for an already strained workforce increased.

Locally, our team has been hard at work to expand trucking school capabilities to attract new drivers to the industry to help relieve some of the labor shortages we're feeling across North Central and Northeast Florida. We have also worked with our domestic producers in Florida and across the country to increase our fertilizer production to lessen our dependence on Russia and China. Finally, we've introduced and co-sponsored legislation to jumpstart domestic energy production to unlock our capabilities and reduce our reliance on imports.

The complexity of the supply chain challenges simple solutions. We must continue to monitor input costs as loggers and truckers are the supply chain links that connect the woods to the mill. It is clear the forestry industry relies on all aspects in order to operate, and it's in everyone's interest to make sure that wood moves smoothly from the forests to the mill. With rising costs, we cannot let the value our forest products provide to our state diminish. I'm committed to working toward sensible solutions for Florida's harvesters as the ongoing challenges continue. I invite you to learn more about our work on the House Agriculture Committee and in Congress to deliver much needed relief where possible.

I look forward to connecting with the many Florida Forestry Association members soon and thank you for all you do to keep our state and our nation moving. Our daily lives are affected by your work, and though it seems thankless at times, please know you have dedicated champions in your corner to tackle these challenges head-on.

Congresswoman Kat Cammack proudly serves Florida's Third Congressional District as the youngest Republican woman in the 117th Congress. She is a member of the House Agriculture Committee, House Select Committee on the Economy, and serves as the lead Republican on the House Homeland Security Committee Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery.