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The labor union representing more than 1,000 Florida sugar workers has requested a meeting with Gov. Charlie Crist over the state's plans to purchase U.S. Sugar Corp.

In June, Crist announced that the South Florida Water Management District is purchasing U.S. Sugar for \$1.75 billion as part of the Everglades restoration plan. The deal calls for U.S. Sugar, which employs 1,700 people, to stay in production for the next six years.

Robert Martinez Jr., Dallas-based general vice president of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, is seeking the meeting on behalf of its 400 members who work at U.S. Sugar in Clewiston and its 625 members who work at West Palm Beach-based Florida Crystals. 'Our concern is that the purchase of U.S. Sugar and the resulting evisceration of the industry and its economic base in Clewiston represents an extreme 'slash and burn' position,' Martinez said in a letter.

The union is in favor of Everglades restoration but would like to see U.S. Sugar's mill and refinery in Clewiston remain in operation, union spokesman Bob Wood said Thursday. 'We think it's important that somebody stands up and tries to preserve those jobs,' Wood said.

