

June 14, 2023

Thomas Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave. S.W
Washington DC 20250

SUBJECT: Northeast Freeze Damage Aid

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

On behalf of the NEASDA delegation, we write to you today to consider direct aid to businesses that were impacted by crop loss or damage due to a late freeze in May of this year. Temperatures plummeted below 25 degrees for multiple days across this ten-state region, destroying fruit blossoms, young produce plants, and damaging vines at many orchards and vineyards.

According to the Director of the University of Vermont's Horticulture Research and Education Center, this is the worst freeze/frost damage observed in more than 25 years in the industry. In addition, Cornell University Climate Center experts declared May 18 to be a record-breaking freeze event. Many growers in the region are reporting their worst-ever damage, even with operations implementing frost protection measures. Overall, this extensive damage was due to the degree of the temperature dip, duration of the frost, and inability to protect all crops.

Collectively, we sit at a critical crossroad with our growers. Right now, growers are assessing their ability to stay in this industry. Unfortunately, many orchards, produce operations, and vineyards are either uninsured or under insured and insurance claims are unlikely to cover the total business loss from crop damage and reduced revenue from value-added products. Without aid, we will see devastating blows to local economies because of downsizing and closing businesses.

Currently, several states in the region are in the process of requesting a Secretarial Disaster Declaration. Should the requests be approved, it is the general understanding that growers may have access to low-interest loans and perhaps, in certain circumstances, loan forgiveness of existing Farm Service Agency (FSA) loans. While a Disaster Declaration from USDA is an essential first step, loan opportunities and loan forgiveness are not a sufficient solution.

Now, with anticipated dramatic revenue losses, growers will need direct aid to maintain position in the marketplace, support their invaluable staff, and cover overhead costs to recover in time for next season. Our collective request is for increased aid from USDA, and potentially through the Farm Bill, to support businesses that have experienced crop and revenue losses during this event. Please consider this request on behalf of the NEASDA delegation as we work to support and maintain our critical agricultural businesses.

Thank you,



Bryan Hurlburt
Commissioner
Connecticut Department of Agriculture



Michael T. Scuse
Secretary
Delaware Department of Agriculture



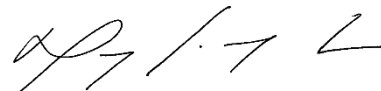
Amanda Beal
Commissioner
Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry



Ashley Randle
Commissioner
Massachusetts Department of Agriculture



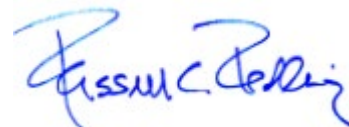
Shawn Jasper
Commissioner
New Hampshire Department of Agriculture, Markets & Food



Douglas Fisher
Secretary
New Jersey Department of Agriculture



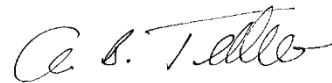
Richard A. Ball
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