

PHILIP B. SCOTT
GOVERNOR



State of Vermont
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

June 19, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

On May 17-18, 2023, Vermont suffered a damaging freeze early in our growing season when temperatures dropped to below freezing in every region and plummeted to at least as low as 20 degrees. The hard frost destroyed fruit blossoms and damaged vines throughout the state. We anticipate severe crop losses. Consequently, in accordance with 7 C.F.R. 759, I request a Secretarial Disaster Designation for the State of Vermont including Windham, Windsor, Orange, Washington, Caledonia, Orleans, Essex, Lamoille, Grand Isle, Franklin, Chittenden, Addison, Rutland and Bennington Counties.

The National Weather Service provided recorded temperatures and the University of Vermont (UVM) conducted a preliminary analysis. My Secretary of the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, Anson Tebbetts, observed some of the damage and received additional reports. The Director of UVM's Horticulture Research and Education Center said it is the worst freeze/frost damage he has observed in more than 25 years in the industry. He also said many growers are reporting their worst-ever damage.

UVM's Fruit Program (Program) conducted a preliminary survey and performed a quantitative assessment on selected farms. In its survey, the Program received 37 reports from at least nine counties recounting widespread damage to fruit crops, including apples, grapes, peaches, other stone fruit, and blueberries. Farmers reported debilitating damage with most orchards describing at least 95% crop losses. In total, farmers reported approximately \$5.8 million in projected orchard losses. The Program estimates more than \$10 million in total losses when including orchards that did not participate in the survey.

Vineyards were also hard hit, and farmers reported an average 52% crop loss (from a 5-97% range). Commercial vineyards in Chittenden County reported an average crop loss of 66%. The reported losses equal approximately \$927,000 in damages, and the Program estimates \$1.2 million in total losses when including non-reporting vineyards.

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The damage is extensive and pervasive, and we anticipate small pick-your-own farms may be particularly impacted. Unfortunately, the vast majority of Vermont's orchards and vineyards do not have crop insurance.

A Secretarial Disaster Designation will open the availability of financial assistance including low-interest USDA Farm Service Agency emergency loans for eligible producers in the approved counties.

We appreciate USDA's vital support and are grateful your Agency works to mitigate the impact of natural disasters on farms. Thank you for your consideration of my request. If your staff has any questions or requires additional information or documentation, please contact Vermont's Secretary of the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, Anson Tebbetts at anson.tebbetts@vermont.gov or at (802) 324-9850.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Philip B. Scott', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Philip B. Scott
Governor

PBS/kp

c: John D. E. Roberts, State Executive Director, FSA
Anson B. Tebbetts, Secretary