

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 9, 2026

Ms. Brooke Rollins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Rollins,

As farmers face continued trade uncertainty, rising input costs, and natural disasters, we encourage you to expedite economic and disaster assistance that will benefit all farmers, including specialty crop growers. Specialty crop growers face tight margins, limited risk-management tools, and increasingly volatile markets and need timely relief. We know that the U.S. Department of Agriculture has implemented funding included in the *American Relief Act of 2025* for economic losses in 2024 and natural disaster losses in 2023 and 2024. We were encouraged that disaster assistance for losses in 2023 and 2024 announced last summer used a simplified pre-filled application for Stage 1 that topped-up indemnities paid under Federal Crop Insurance and the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program.

While significant assistance flowed quickly to farmers in the summer and fall, payments were limited to 35 percent of approved applications. As a result, less than \$6 billion out of the \$16 billion available has been paid out to farmers more than a year after Congress provided the funds and nearly three years after some farmers faced losses. It appears that nearly all Stage 1 applications have been submitted to USDA as payments on USDA's dashboard have leveled off in recent weeks.

We are concerned that the subsequent announcement of the second stage of disaster assistance extended the deadline for both stages through the end of April 2026 and would delay decisions to adjust the factor on payments until at least May. This timeline means that farmers will have to wait until late spring or summer for a major portion of the assistance. Farmers are talking to their lenders right now to make plans. Adjusting the factor and making additional top-up payments now will expedite assistance now when farmers need it most.

Additionally, with your recent announcement of the Farmer Bridge Assistance program of \$12 billion, just \$1 billion of that total is for specialty crops, sugarbeets, and other crops, even though specialty crop sectors have been hit hard by lost markets, rising input costs, labor shortages, and ongoing economic uncertainty. No further details have been released about how the \$1 billion in aid will be structured, which likely means it will be well into 2026 before any payments are issued. As you develop this assistance, we strongly urge you to look at the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program Stage 2 and the Marketing Assistance for Specialty Crops programs as guides for developing a program that reflects the unique needs of specialty crop growers. We also encourage you to ensure this assistance truly meets the needs of all farmers.

Thank you again for your work on implementation of this critical assistance and for due consideration of our suggestions to ensure all farmers are able to access aid quickly.

Sincerely,



Amy Klobuchar

United States Senator



Elissa Slotkin

United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet

United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand

United States Senator



Cory A. Booker

United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen

United States Senator



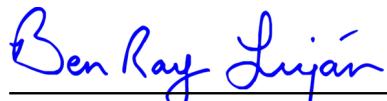
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United States Senator



Tina Smith

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Raphael Warnock

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