

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3205

August 17, 2026

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Jamie L. Whitten Building, Suite 200-A
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Rollins,

I respectfully ask the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), through the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), to work with Concord grape producers along the Lake Erie Grape Belt and the Niagara region of New York to initiate a bonus buy of Concord grape juice across Fiscal Years 2026 and 27. I also write to thank USDA for its previous announcement of a Section 32 purchase of Concord grape juice in January 2026. An additional bonus buy will help replace lost demand that the unexpected departure of Refresco, a major processor of Concord and Niagara grapes in Western New York, is having on hundreds of family-owned farms across the region.

Recently, Refresco has abruptly ended all contracts involving these grapes in March effective for the 2026 harvest. Approximately 130 growers representing 2,600 acres of Concord grape production across the Lake Erie Grape Belt and Niagara area have had their supplier contracts terminated, leaving them without an effective buyer for their crop for the upcoming harvest. As a result, many farmers across the region will be forced to cut back supply or potentially abandon the Concord grape altogether. The loss of these farms would have drastic consequences for the producers themselves, other processors, transporters, and equipment manufacturers as well as negatively impacting the economies of small, rural towns across Western New York.

Furthermore, grape juice demand has already seen a contraction over recent years, with consumption declining by over 25 percent since 2023. This, combined with the year-over-year increase of 53 percent in the Concord grape harvest, would lower commodity prices to a point that would likely force many small farms out of business, and would have negative, far-reaching impacts on the grape markets and local economies of much of Western New York.

Given current market conditions, now would be the opportune time for AMS to purchase Concord grape juice. AMS bonus buys have shown to be a successful tool in stabilizing the market, reducing carryover inventory, and providing fresh juice to schoolchildren and families alike. Without USDA intervention, grape producers and local economies alike will be severely harmed.

Swift action by the USDA can help prevent such disruptions and keep over 20,000 acres of New York farmland functioning, as well as supporting the surrounding local communities that rely on this vital crop. However, with the harvest quickly approaching, growers need certainty.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I respectfully request to maintain informed of USDA's efforts to assist the grape industry of Western New York.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

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