



STATE OF NEW JERSEY
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Mikie Sherrill
Governor

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May 20, 2026

The Honorable Brooke L. Rollins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Rollins:

I am writing to request that you urgently grant a U.S. Department of Agriculture - Secretarial Disaster Designation for several counties in New Jersey that sustained extensive agricultural losses after a severe freeze event between April 19 and April 22, 2026.

In mid-April, New Jersey experienced unseasonably warm weather, including days that rose above 90 degrees in some areas, which accelerated the flowering of fruit trees and other crops across the state. This abrupt warm trend was immediately followed by a rapid drop in temperature, with lows in the 20s recorded across some portions of the state. The timing of this freeze struck crops precisely at a critical developmental stage, resulting in severe injury to blossoms and newly forming fruit.

Growers have reported substantial, and in some cases, catastrophic damage across many crop categories, including but not limited to peaches, cherries, pears, grapes, plums, strawberries, blueberries, blackberries, and apple varieties, with the possibility that additional crops may prove affected as the growing season continues. The full impact from this event is yet to be known, but what is certain is that this event resulted in widespread damage across our entire state rather than isolated hardship. Early estimates indicate that losses from this freeze event could reach or exceed \$300 million statewide.

Loss assessments compiled by the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, working with the Farm Service Agency County Committees, show damage exceeding the thirty percent disaster trigger across many areas and crop types, and early information from growers suggests that some farmers are experiencing losses approaching or surpassing ninety percent. In several regions, these losses may be season ending for key fruit crops.

New Jersey's agricultural sector is an engine of the New Jersey economy, producing more than \$1.5 billion in wholesale value annually while supporting over 25,000 jobs across fruit and vegetable farming, nursery and greenhouse production, field crops, cut flowers, and livestock. Impacts from this freeze event also extend beyond the field. Downstream businesses, agritourism partners, retail establishments, and local economies are also likely to feel significant economic strain as a result of reduced farm output.

The financial pressure caused by this event will make it difficult for affected growers to prepare for the 2027 season without immediate federal relief. Emergency assistance is essential to preserve farm operations, stabilize local economies, and protect New Jersey's agricultural capacity for future seasons.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that the U.S. Department of Agriculture issue a Secretarial Disaster Designation for the affected counties in New Jersey. This will provide critical access to support needed by growers to recover from this event.

Sincerely,

Sincerely,



Mikie Sherrill
Governor