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Governor Christie Announces Agricultural Natural Disaster Designation Approved for 14 New Jersey Counties

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Farmers Suffered Superstorm Sandy, Other Weather-Related Damages During 2012

Trenton, NJ - Governor Chris Christie today announced United States Secretary of Agriculture Thomas Vilsack has granted a Natural Disaster Designation for 14 New Jersey counties following Superstorm Sandy, a snowstorm, a Nor'easter, drought, high winds, hail, excessive heat and rain, and flash flooding between June 28 and November 8, 2012.

The disaster designation was requested to open up another avenue of relief to farmers who lost crops or suffered structural damages to their farms through the many severe weather events that befell the Garden State in 2012. The declaration includes Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, Mercer, Monmouth, Morris, Ocean, Passaic, Salem, Sussex and Warren Counties.

"Superstorm Sandy not only impacted our shoreline, but caused an immense amount of damage for our farmers, who already had suffered losses due to severe weather throughout the season," said Governor Christie. "While federal aid is already being provided through a variety of programs, now farmers will have additional federal agriculture disaster assistance to help them get back on their feet."

For counties to be designated as primary natural disaster areas, they must have sustained a 30 percent or greater production loss to a single crop due to the disaster. Nine counties were designated primary areas, while Mercer, Monmouth, Morris, Passaic and Warren counties were included as contiguous counties, still making them eligible to receive help from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA).

"We are very thankful to Secretary Vilsack for giving our farmers the opportunity to access the USDA's disaster relief programs," said New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture Douglas H. Fisher. "In spite of the many weather-related issues faced by agriculture in 2012, the season was an overall success."

The disaster designation makes farm operators eligible to be considered for assistance from Farm Service Agency, provided eligibility requirements are met. This assistance includes Farm Service Agency emergency loans.

"Although 2012 was a challenging year for many growers in a lot of ways, I'm excited we'll be able to offer this help to recover from their 2012 losses and get them ready for the 2013 season," said Paul Hlubik, Executive Director of USDA's Farm Service Agency in New Jersey. "I'm grateful to Secretary Vilsack and the Christie Administration for their support as we sought this disaster designation. It will not only make farmers eligible for low-interest loans and restructuring, but extend the time for them to apply for assistance."

Farmers in eligible counties now have eight months from the date of the Secretarial disaster declaration to apply for emergency loan assistance. The loans could cover up to 100 percent of the dollar value of the losses. Farmers must have suffered a 30 percent loss in crop production or physical loss to livestock, inventory or property and meet FSA's eligibility requirements. FSA considers each loan application on its own merits, taking into account the extent of losses, security available and repayment ability.

Farmers are encouraged to contact their local FSA office for details. To find a local office, visit <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?state=nj&agency=fsa>. For more information on FSA's disaster assistance programs, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=diap&topic=landing.

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