

September 27, 2024

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Johnson, Leader Schumer, Leader Jeffries, and Leader McConnell:

The undersigned California agricultural organizations write once again to express the overdue need to address the severe impacts and losses felt by California's agricultural producers and communities in 2023 due to relentless natural disasters. We remain deeply concerned regarding the lack of attention agricultural disaster funding has received in Congress. While we eagerly await passage of a Farm Bill that includes additional crop insurance mechanisms for producers, we urge Congress to urgently address and prioritize a 2023 natural disaster relief package for farmers and ranchers.

During 2023, producers across California faced unprecedented weather events and natural disaster. Storms from the previous December continued into March, and multiple atmospheric rivers caused intense rainfall and flooding. In August and September, severe impacts followed Hurricane Hilary and related rain events. All told, it is estimated that the state was hit with a staggering \$2.4 billion in agricultural damages and losses. We are also aware that many producers in other states across the nation experienced significant agricultural losses due to natural disasters including hurricanes, floods, drought, tornadoes, and wildfire.

We are concerned that the urgency to assemble a disaster assistance package has not been adequately met by Congress. Especially absent a Farm Bill reauthorization, it is vital that USDA disaster programs are authorized and sufficiently funded to support California's farmers and ranchers for the natural disasters they endured in 2023.

We respectfully request that Congress provide authorization and funding commensurate with estimated uncovered losses due to natural disaster for 2023. Such funding levels would allow USDA to operate natural disaster programs effectively, without progressive factoring, providing essential relief to our farmers, ranchers, and rural communities.

As Congress deliberates on funding for disaster relief, we also urge you to address these implementation challenges that producers face with the Emergency Relief Program (ERP):

- Given the dire circumstances, it is critical for USDA to expedite the delivery of disaster assistance more responsively. Streamlining disaster programs for quicker delivery is essential.
- We suggest USDA adopt a consistent framework for ERP, eliminating the two-phase implementation approach. This change will prevent certain producers from being consistently deprioritized and aid in faster program delivery.

- It is important that any supplemental disaster assistance recognizes and compensates for a broad range of damages, including revenue loss, not just physical damages.

In conclusion, we implore Congress to work collaboratively and act swiftly to address the urgent natural disaster relief needs of California's farmers and ranchers.

Respectfully,

Almond Alliance
American Pistachio Growers
California Agricultural Commissioners and Sealers Association
California Apple Commission
California Alfalfa and Forage Association
California Association of Wheat Growers
California Association of Winegrape Growers
California Avocado Commission
California Bean Shippers Association
California Cherry Growers and Industry Association
California Citrus Mutual
California Date Commission
California Farm Bureau
California Fresh Fruit Association
California Grain and Feed Association
California Pear Growers Association
California Pork Producers Association
California Seed Association
California Strawberry Commission
California Sweetpotato Council
California Table Grape Commission
California Tomato Growers Association
California Walnut Commission
California Warehouse Association
Grower-Shipper Association of Central California
Grower-Shipper Association of Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo Counties International
Fresh Produce Association
International Fresh Produce Association
Olive Oil Commission of California
Milk Producers Council
Ventura County Agricultural Association
Western Ag Crop Insurance Services
Western Growers

cc: The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair of the Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chair of the House Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair of the Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member of the House Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Martin Heinrich
Chair of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food & Drug Administration, & Related Agencies

The Honorable Andy Harris, M.D.
Chair of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food & Drug Administration, & Related Agencies

The Honorable John Hoeven
Ranking Member of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food & Drug Administration, & Related Agencies

The Honorable Sanford Bishop, Jr.
Ranking Member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food & Drug Administration

California Congressional Delegation