

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 15, 2023

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We write to urge the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to approve Governor Scott's request for a Secretarial Disaster Designation for the State of Vermont, and stand ready to provide further support, as requested, to communities in Vermont facing catastrophic flooding.

In addition, we ask the Department—operating through the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Rural Development—to expand workforce capacity in Vermont to support loss assessment documentation and provide technical assistance to our farmers, residents, and communities.

Excessive rainfall has caused major flooding in Vermont, with some areas receiving as much as nine inches of rain since July 8. The impacts have been catastrophic:

- More than 80 roads and state highways have closed due to major flooding, impeding the collection of milk from farms and forcing dairy producers to dump milk.
- Extensive flooding and field saturation has occurred throughout the state, causing heavy losses for our fruit and vegetable growers—just months after an unseasonable freeze in May also caused extensive crop damage.
- Acres upon acres of prime agricultural fields now lie under a layer of silt deposited by floodwaters.

It is imperative that the federal government, working in conjunction with the state, mobilize as many resources as possible to quickly bring aid to Vermont's agricultural sector. We are heartened that on July 14th, President Biden approved a major disaster declaration for all counties in Vermont, with an additional authorization of individual assistance for six counties. However, Vermont will need additional, ongoing support from USDA. We therefore ask that you quickly approve Governor Scott's request for a Secretarial Disaster Designation, and any additional requests for support forthcoming from the state.

In addition, we ask that you take steps to expand staffing capacity at regional USDA offices to ensure that agricultural support to Vermonters is timely and efficient. Specifically, we ask you to:

- **Deploy jump teams from regional FSA and NRCS offices across the country to supplement staff capacity in Vermont.** With an expected influx in requests for support in navigating the many USDA disaster assistance programs, this extra capacity will be needed to ensure paperwork is filled out accurately and processed in a timely manner. Any delays in these processes will only compound the losses faced by our farmers and ranchers.
- **Fully staff the USDA Rural Development regional office serving Vermont and New Hampshire.** The Rural Development regional office has approximately half of the staff it had a few years ago. The support of USDA Rural Development staff will be essential as our municipalities, households, and businesses rebuild. Fully staffing the office to the former level is critical to a speedy and successful recovery of the areas impacted by the disaster.

We are grateful for all the support USDA has already provided and would like to reiterate how critical that is to mitigating the impact of this natural disaster on Vermont farms and communities. We urge you to quickly approve Governor Scott's Secretarial Disaster Designation request and expand USDA staffing resources for the state. Together we can help Vermont's farmers successfully respond to this disaster and facilitate their path to recovery.

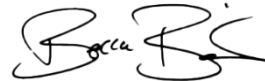
Sincerely,



PETER WELCH
United States Senator



BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator



BECCA BALINT
United States Congresswoman