



September 29, 2023

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Subject: Urgent Need for Transparency and Expedited Distribution of 2022 ERP Funding for Almond Farmers

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

I am writing to express our deep concern over the evident lack of transparency and delay associated with the Emergency Relief Program (ERP) funding designated for farmers affected by natural disasters in 2022. Today, we urgently request the USDA to expedite the distribution of the disaster assistance earmarked for this crop year. The urgency and gravity of this situation cannot be overstated, given the challenges our agricultural community has faced.

As you're undoubtedly aware, the 2022 crop year presented a particularly challenging environment for almond farmers nationwide. The widespread damage due to unprecedented freezing conditions, as acknowledged in your Secretarial Disaster Declaration dated November 2022, combined with the costliest year in a century and various supply chain disruptions, have left many farmers, especially our uninsured, small, and underserved members, in an alarming state of vulnerability.

To label the disaster response as inadequate would be an understatement. We're genuinely concerned that the USDA has lagged in its support for consecutive years despite our community's adherence to best practices. The limited insurance options available to us only accentuate this disparity.

It's noteworthy that as almond producers grappled with historic high costs in production inputs like fertilizer, fuel, feed, and seed, we also contended with a series of natural disasters that hampered our operations. These financial challenges have amplified the urgency of our request.

Under the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023, Congress allocated \$3.7 billion for producers impacted by the 2022 natural disasters. The USDA's May 19, 2023, announcement conveyed plans to expediently channel this assistance via the ERP. Despite assurances of proactive communication to keep us abreast of program details, our Almond growers must be aware of the intended timeline for these much-needed delayed funds.

The 2023 crop year's persistent high production costs, coupled with diminishing almond prices and the onslaught of new disasters, emphasize the gravity of the predicament faced by our growers and processors.

We're reminded of the efficacy of the former administration in initiating the Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity Program (WHIP), which saw funds distributed in under two months post-appropriation. In stark contrast, the USDA has yet to allocate any ERP funds for 2022 despite being more than nine months post-appropriation and purportedly intending to adopt a methodology similar to the 2020 and 2021 disaster payments.

Given the dire circumstances, we urge the USDA to expedite the distribution of the disaster assistance earmarked for the 2022 crop year. We hope this appeal underscores the significance of this matter, and we are grateful for your attention and timely intervention.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Should a meeting be deemed beneficial, we are ready and willing to convene to discuss immediate remedies. We look forward to seeing actionable steps taken to address these pressing concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Aubrey Bettencourt". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Aubrey" being more prominent and the last name "Bettencourt" following in a similar style.

Aubrey Bettencourt
President & CEO
Almond Alliance

Enclosures



Office of the Secretary
Washington, DC 20250

November 4, 2022

THE HONORABLE GAVIN NEWSOM
Governor
State of California
State Capitol
Suite 1173
Sacramento, California 95814

Dear Governor Newsom:

On May 26 through July 12, 2022, the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services and the County of Yolo, requested a primary county disaster designation for eight counties in California, due to damage and losses caused by freeze that occurred from April 11 through April 12, 2022. At that time, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) was unable to make a complete and accurate determination of production losses for the current crop year. On October 27, 2022, the California State Office notified the National Office that all loss assessment reports were completed.

USDA reviewed the Loss Assessment Report and determined that there were sufficient production losses to warrant a Secretarial natural disaster designation. Therefore, I am designating eight counties in California, as primary natural disaster areas. In accordance with section 321(a) of the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act, additional areas of your state and an adjacent state are named as contiguous disaster counties. Enclosed you will find documentation that provides a detailed list of all primary and contiguous counties impacted by this disaster.

A Secretarial disaster designation makes farm operators in primary counties and those counties contiguous to such primary counties eligible to be considered for certain assistance from the Farm Service Agency (FSA), provided eligibility requirements are met. This assistance includes FSA emergency loans. Farmers in eligible counties have 8 months from the date of a Secretarial disaster declaration to apply for emergency loans. FSA considers each emergency loan application on its own merits, taking into account the extent of production losses on the farm and the security and repayment ability of the operator.

Local FSA offices can provide affected farmers with further information.

Sincerely,

THOMAS J. VILSACK
Secretary

Enclosure

Disaster Designation Areas for California and a Contiguous State

Primary Counties

California	(8)		
Butte	Nevada	Tehama	Yolo
Glenn	Placer	Tuolumne	Yuba

Contiguous Counties:

California	(18)		
Alpine	Mariposa	Shasta	
Calaveras	Mendocino	Sierra	
Colusa	Mono	Solano	
El Dorado	Napa	Stanislaus	
Lake	Plumas	Sutter	
Madera	Sacramento	Trinity	

Contiguous Counties in an Adjacent State:

Nevada	(3)	
Douglas	Washoe	Carson City