

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 27, 2026

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Rollins:

We write to urge the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to ensure that payment rates under the Assistance for Specialty Crop Farmers (ASCF) Program fully and accurately reflect the economic realities facing Maine producers. Given the absence of reliable, up-to-date cost-of-production and farm-gate pricing data for many specialty crops, it is essential that USDA work directly with Maine's specialty crop stakeholders to establish payment rates that meaningfully address current losses. Failure to do so risks leaving critical sectors of Maine's agricultural economy without adequate relief during a period of extraordinary financial strain.

Maine produces nearly all the nation's wild blueberries—an industry that contributes hundreds of millions of dollars annually to the state's economy and sustains rural communities. In 2024, Maine produced approximately 85 million pounds of wild blueberries. In 2025, however, an exceptionally wet spring that disrupted pollination, followed by severe drought conditions, reduced production to roughly 54 million pounds, representing an estimated \$28 million loss in revenue. These losses compound years of declining markets and rising labor and input costs. Moreover, because wild blueberries operate on a biennial crop-and-prune cycle, basing ASCF payments solely on reported 2025 planted acres will disproportionately disadvantage Maine growers. We strongly urge USDA to adjust ASCF Program's methodology to account for the unique production cycle of this crop so that relief is not diminished for one of the nation's most distinctive agricultural industries.

Maine's potato industry, the largest agricultural sector in the state, with an estimated \$1.3 billion economic impact, also faces acute pressures. Retaliatory tariffs, trade uncertainty, elevated input costs, labor shortages, and drought-related yield reductions are expected to result in approximately \$30 million in lost revenue this year alone. Maine growers operate in an integrated cross-border market with Canada, our state's largest trading partner. Growers rely heavily on Canadian suppliers for equipment, fertilizer, and other inputs, while also shipping a significant share of their crop across the border for processing. Growers have shared with our offices that current trade disruptions have led to an estimated 10 percent decline in export volume. This is a major decrease in income for those growers and unfortunately for some, there is no other avenue for them to sell their potatoes. Without targeted federal support that reflects these unique cross-border dynamics, Maine's potato growers will continue to absorb disproportionate losses.

Maine's apple industry, though smaller in scale comparatively, plays a vital role in sustaining family farms, agritourism, and regional food systems. The 2025 harvest declined to approximately 600,000 bushels, well below the typical 800,000 to 1 million bushels annually produced, resulting in an estimated \$10 million loss for growers. Even where crop quality held steady, reduced volume combined with rising labor, transportation, and other input costs have significantly compressed margins. Specialty crop producers cannot simply offset these costs through scale; they require targeted and responsive relief mechanisms.

Beyond specialty crops, Maine's forest products and commercial fishing industries are foundational to our rural and coastal economies and have experienced significant market disruption tied to trade volatility and retaliatory

tariffs. Softwood lumber disputes and cross-border tariff escalation continue to undermine investment and pricing stability in the forest products sector. Likewise, retaliatory tariffs in key seafood markets have reduced demand and depressed dockside prices for Maine lobster, all while fuel, bait, and equipment costs have surged. Despite facing many of the same market distortions that justified federal assistance for other commodities, these industries were excluded from both the Farmer Bridge Assistance Program and the ASCF Program.

As USDA evaluates future relief efforts, we strongly urge the Department to ensure that Maine's lumber and fisheries industries are not overlooked. Equity in federal relief requires that industries facing comparable trade-driven harm receive comparable support. The Seafood Trade Relief Program (STRP) offered by the USDA in 2020 was invaluable for Maine's lobster fishery.

We appreciate USDA's prior engagement with Maine's potato, blueberry, and apple stakeholders. However, continued consultation is not simply beneficial, it is necessary to ensure that federal assistance reflects on-the-ground conditions. We urge USDA to adjust payment methodologies where needed, account for crop-specific production cycles, and expand eligibility where appropriate so that relief is both fair and economically meaningful.

Maine's producers are resilient, but resilience alone cannot offset sustained market disruption and escalating costs. We stand ready to work with you to ensure that USDA programs deliver the targeted, data-driven support that Maine's agriculture industry needs.

Sincerely,



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress



Jared Golden
Member of Congress