

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

October 18, 2021

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

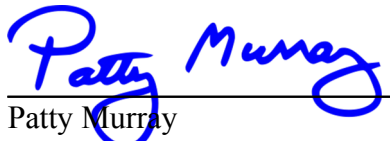
Thank you for your continued work to deliver relief to our farmers, ranchers, Tribes, and communities in the Pacific Northwest impacted by severe weather events. To support those efforts, Congress provided \$10 billion to cover qualifying losses experienced by agricultural producers as part of H.R.5305, the *Extending Government Funding and Delivering Emergency Assistance Act*. As the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) works to swiftly implement the program, we write to urge you to utilize the full eligibilities provided in the statute to assist producers in our states hit hard by extreme heat, drought, wildfires, smoke exposure, and related crop quality losses. Additionally, we request that USDA offer guidance as soon as practicable on what types of documentation will be needed for farmers so that they can be ready and able to access this assistance.


A number of us wrote to you in July regarding the extreme heat, drought, low soil moisture, and wildfires the Pacific Northwest experienced this summer, with temperatures reaching as high as 120 degrees Fahrenheit. As we mentioned then, many of the producers who suffered some of the greatest heat-related losses—scorched fruit, damaged canes, increased shellfish mortality—were either located in counties not covered by the drought designations, experienced losses not covered by drought assistance programs, or both. To better address the extent of these losses, Congress provided new flexibilities in H.R.5305 to amend the previous Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity Program-Plus (WHIP+) authorization, including coverage for losses related to excessive heat and smoke exposure for wine grapes—and inclusive of crop quality loss and damage to on-farm stored commodities.


As USDA drafts guidelines for the new program, we ask that you work with producers to include temperature-based thresholds for eligibility to capture heat-related losses, similar to extreme temperature models utilized in the Emergency Livestock Assistance Program. This will be critical for berry crops, shellfish, tree fruits, potatoes, dairy products, and beef cattle in parts of the Pacific Northwest which suffered some of the greatest yield and quality losses as a result of the severe heat wave, but may not operate in counties covered by D3 or 8-week D2 drought designations.

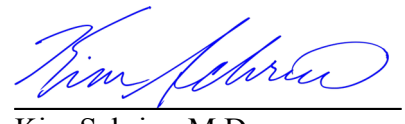
We urge prompt implementation of this critical assistance and appreciate your continued work to deliver relief to our agricultural producers in the Pacific Northwest impacted by severe weather events. Thank you for your consideration.

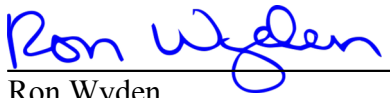
Sincerely,

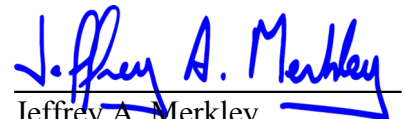

Patty Murray
United States Senator



Suzan K. DelBene
Member of Congress

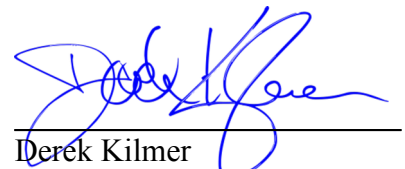

Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress

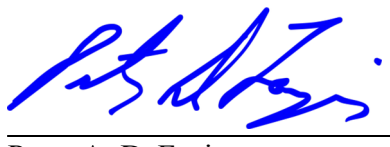

Kim Schrier, M.D.
Member of Congress

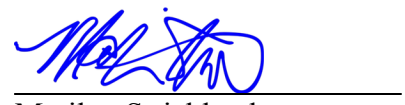

Ron Wyden
United States Senator

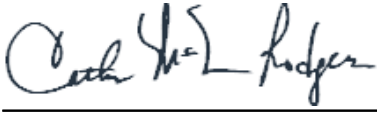

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator


Maria Cantwell
United States Senator


Derek Kilmer
Member of Congress


Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress

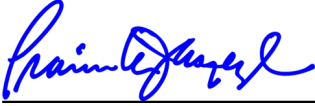

Marilyn Strickland
Member of Congress



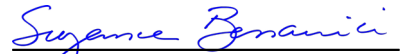
Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Member of Congress



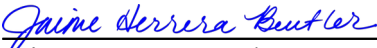
Adam Smith
Member of Congress



Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress



Jaime Herrera Beutler
Member of Congress