

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 13, 2009

Honorable Thomas Vilsack
Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture
Room 200 Administration Building
14th and Independence Avenue
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We are writing to respectfully request that you support the natural disaster designation requested by Governor Jon Corzine of New Jersey. The natural disaster designation will apply to the counties in New Jersey that have experienced damages this season due to severe storms and a tornado.

Serious weather conditions this growing season have hampered agricultural production throughout the state of New Jersey. Since the middle of April, New Jersey has experienced periods of high winds, hail, and heavy rainfall. On July 29, 2009, severe thunderstorms and a tornado touched down in parts of New Jersey. The damages included hundreds of downed trees, widespread power losses, and floods that closed down segments of highways. Among the individuals most starkly hit by *the inclement* weather were local farmers, many of whom incurred significant crop losses and property damages. Members of the State Emergency Board have acknowledged that severe weather conditions can also increase the likelihood of late blight in vegetables and vomitoxin in wheat.

We respectfully request that you issue a natural disaster designation for weather-induced damages since April 15, 2009 in Burlington, Camden, Mercer, Ocean, Sussex, and Warren Counties. Additional counties should be added as more information on the extent of the damages becomes available. Our request is supported by Governor Corzine and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's State Emergency Board, which has unanimously recommended a U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretarial Natural Disaster Designation.

New Jersey's food and agriculture complex is an \$82 billion industry critical to the state's economic vitality. The natural disaster designation would make New Jersey farmers eligible for low-interest emergency loans from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Services Agency, in addition to other assistance provided by the federal government. This designation will enable farmers to recover losses, rebuild infrastructure, and continue productive agricultural practices after the harmful effects of this growing season's weather conditions.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,


FRANK R. LAUTENBERG
United States Senator


ROBERT MENENDEZ
United States Senator