

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

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We write regarding the importance of ensuring federal policies are successfully supporting apple growers in New England.

New England's apple orchards play a vital role in our local food systems and our cultural heritage. New England's smaller-scale growers, who primarily sell locally and often directly to consumers, are key drivers of our local rural economies and a hub for our communities. In fact, "pick-your-own apples" is not only the primary source of income for many New England apple growers; it is also a widespread family tradition in our region that fosters local community as well as a driver of tourism that supports local economic activity.

Apple growers in New England face unique challenges and structural factors that often differ substantially from growers in other regions. In general, New England growers are underserved by federal agriculture support policies, including by crop insurance policies. The changing weather conditions and severe weather events that our growers are increasingly facing demonstrate the acute need to address this disparity and ensure a stronger safety net for our growers.

As you know, New England Members of Congress have significant concerns with a rule proposed by USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) that would make harmful changes to the Apple Crop Insurance Provisions. Many of us wrote to RMA on June 11, 2023 about this issue and urged the agency to take New England growers' concerns into consideration as the agency evaluated its proposal.

We appreciate that the agency has subsequently engaged in a serious and thorough manner with New England growers to listen to their concerns and to learn about their needs. We appreciate that, as a result of this feedback, RMA intends not to move forward with the changes as originally proposed and intends to take its time to determine the best path forward. We commend the agency for making the right decision in response to our growers' concerns, and we appreciate the agency's efforts to ensure its policies work for apple growers in New England.

We are particularly pleased that RMA is convening a working group of New England apple growers to better inform the agency's future work and how its policies can better serve New England growers. We are very interested in monitoring the progress of this working group and request that the agency keep our offices informed on its work. We also encourage the agency to consider convening similar regional working groups for growers of other crops.

Thank you for your attention to these issues.

Sincerely,

CC: The Honorable Marcia Bunger, Administrator, Risk Management Agency, United States
Department of Agriculture