Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

June 7, 2012

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

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We are writing in support of the state of Michigan's request for federal disaster assistance for farmers in Michigan who are facing significant crop losses due to extreme weather conditions in the winter and spring of 2012.

A series of unprecedented weather events impacting the Lower and Upper Peninsulas of Michigan have resulted in the worst fruit crop many farmers have faced in their lifetimes. Seventy-two counties throughout our state experienced severe weather, most notably damaging frost but also excessive snow, blizzards, high winds, hail, tornadoes, flooding, and excessive rain. Estimates indicate that more than 90 percent of Michigan's apple, cherry, and peach crops have been lost. More than 85 percent of the juice grape crop has been lost, and as much as 10 percent of the asparagus crop has been lost or damaged. We estimate that the economic loss to fruit and asparagus crops alone will exceed $220 million.

This drastic reduction in crop yields will pose significant financial hardships for Michigan farmers and their families, as well as the permanent and seasonal workers employed by these operations. Supporting industries such as agricultural manufacturing and processing, chemical and fertilizer retailers, and equipment rental, sales and repair will similarly suffer.

A USDA disaster declaration in Michigan will provide farmers the necessary option of applying for emergency loans through the Farm Service Agency. For many farmers, this lifeline will be essential to their ability to meet financial obligations. Emergency loans are vital to farmers who may have no other source of revenue over the next fifteen to eighteen months.

We urge your full and expeditious consideration of the state's request, and look forward to working with the Department in the coming weeks and months to provide much-need relief for struggling Michigan farmers.

Sincerely,

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