

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 11, 2023

The Honorable Marcia Bunger
Administrator, Risk Management Agency
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

RE: Federal Register Docket ID FCIC-21-0007

Dear Administrator Bunger,

We write to express our concern with proposed changes to the Apple Crop Insurance Provisions that could adversely impact apple growers in New England. We appreciate the efforts of the Risk Management Agency (RMA) to support American farmers and update programs to reflect a changing risk landscape, yet we are concerned that small, independent growers in our region may not be served adequately by a “one size fits all” approach. As RMA finalizes its proposal, we urge you to take steps to ensure that New England growers are not adversely impacted by proposed changes. We request that you consider the concerns of New England growers as the agency charts a path forward that both advances RMA’s objectives and provides an adequate and flexible farm safety net for growers in our region.

Apple growers in New England face a unique set of challenges, and RMA’s risk management tools represent some of the most important and readily accessible federal resources for them. Most New England orchards are small, independent, family-owned operations that produce fresh apples that are marketed locally. Through small-scale wholesale and direct market models like pick-your-own operations, our orchards are integral to local food systems and drivers of our local economies. Yet despite their regional importance, New England growers often lack access to local processing capacity, which limits marketing opportunities beyond fresh apples. Additionally, unlike in many other apple-growing regions, land access and affordability are significant issues in the population-dense Northeast, while the increased frequency of extreme weather events underscores the need for a robust federal risk management option.

Given these challenges, it is critical that federal apple crop insurance policies work for these growers, as we have significant concerns that adverse changes may compel New England growers to forgo insurance coverage altogether. Specifically, we are concerned that RMA’s proposed changes to the “Fresh Fruit Quality Option” may severely impact producers who disproportionately rely on fresh fruit sales due to a lack of processing capacity. We are also concerned with proposed changes to mandatory reporting requirements that, while important to maintaining program integrity, may prove overly burdensome for the nation’s smallest producers. Finally, we are concerned that the addition of new cultural practices requirements for fresh apple production coverage – without regard to farm acreage or region-specific practicalities – may prevent many New England growers from accessing risk management tools.

As RMA incorporates input from the public comment period and listening sessions, we ask that you consider the potential impacts of any changes on New England growers. Thank you for your consideration of this request and for your work on behalf of farmers in our region and across the country. We look forward to your response.

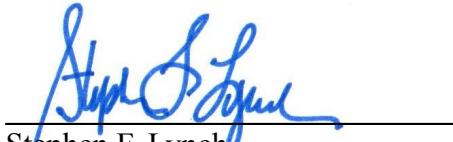
Sincerely,



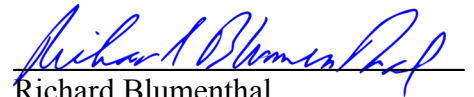
James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



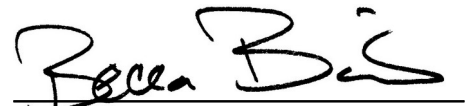
Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



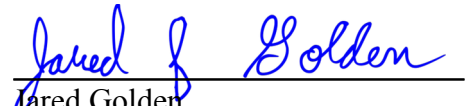
Jack Reed
United States Senator



Becca Balint
Member of Congress



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



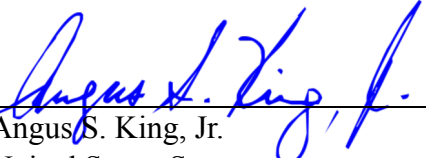
Jared Golden
Member of Congress



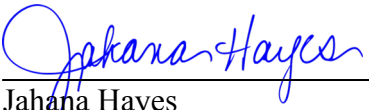
Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress



Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress




Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator




Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress



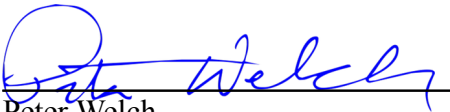
Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress



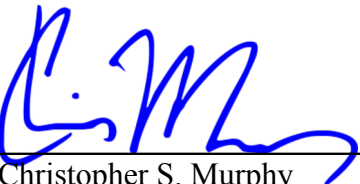
Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



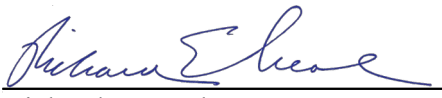
Lori Trahan
Member of Congress



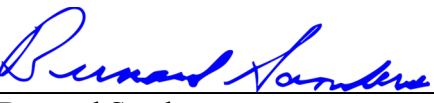
Peter Welch
United States Senator



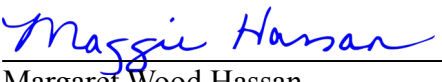
Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator




Richard E. Neal
Member of Congress




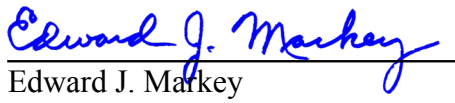
Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

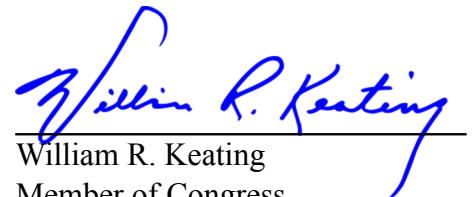


Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator


Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator


Joe Courtney
Member of Congress


Edward J. Markey
United States Senator


William R. Keating
Member of Congress