



TINA KOTEK  
GOVERNOR

July 2, 2026

The Honorable Brooke L. Rollins, Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250

RE: Request for a Secretarial Natural Disaster Designation and Market Relief for the  
2025 Hood River Valley Pear Crop

Dear Secretary Rollins,

I write to request that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) declare a Secretarial natural disaster designation for Hood River and Wasco Counties in Oregon, and their contiguous counties for the 2025 crop year. Oregon's pear growers in the Columbia River Gorge were impacted by the worst pear psylla (*Cacopsylla pyri*) infestation in nearly half a century, compounded by excessive summer heat and a short mountain snowpack that tightened irrigation supply. The result is an estimated \$40 to \$45 million in losses and a decline in grower revenue of roughly 50 percent, among the lowest returns these family orchardists have experienced in fifty years. I respectfully ask USDA to act promptly to place federal recovery tools within reach of these producers and to explore disaster relief and market stability opportunities where possible under your broader discretionary authorities.

Oregon has a proud history of a vibrant and diverse agricultural sector that anchors its rural economies and helps feed families across the country. The Pacific Northwest produces approximately 85 percent of the nation's fresh pears, which is Oregon's official state fruit. The Hood River Valley is its heartland, with roughly 16,000 acres of fruit trees, predominantly pears, farmed by third and fourth generation family farmers. Without rapid disaster relief deployment, many of these family farms face bankruptcy ahead of the 2026 harvest. The consequences of a failed season in this valley will be felt in grocery aisles nationwide and in the continued viability of the American family farm.

The 2025 pear psylla outbreak coincided with a summer that ran about 20 percent hotter than the prior five-year average. Psylla coated trees and fruit in honeydew which developed a black sooty mold, the worst outbreak reported by experienced growers. Growers attempted in earnest to mitigate losses by applying over 1,200 gallons per acre of water and soap to their trees, but substantial quality losses remained, not fully covered by disaster relief or traditional crop insurance. The blemishes left by the mold rendered the pears entirely unmarketable. While assistance under the Assistance for Specialty Crop Farmers program will offer some financial

relief, economic impacts far exceed the full scale of bridge payments anticipated to be disbursed in the region. Insect infestation and excessive heat are recognized natural causes of loss, and together they compound the impacts and form the basis of this request.

These natural losses occurred during a market that was already experiencing distress. A substantial 2024 crop, coupled with a gradual adjustment in prices, resulted in a surplus. Consequently, the May 2025 closure of the Del Monte cannery in Yakima, Washington, deprived cannery Bartletts of their primary market destination, compelling them to enter an already saturated fresh market. Although Oregon's pear tonnage rose 36 percent in 2025, grower revenue fell by half, a clear instance of greater volume yielding lower returns. Oregon growers are export-dependent, shipping a substantial share of their crop to Canada and Mexico, and they have absorbed significant harm from disruption to those markets and from unfair trade pressure on American specialty crops. Many are now carrying these losses on personal lines of credit simply to reach the 2026 season.

Given this disaster is in part natural and in part market driven, I respectfully ask USDA to act on two fronts.

1. **Declare a Secretarial natural disaster designation** for Hood River and Wasco Counties and their contiguous counties [JS1.1](Clackamas, Gilliam, Jefferson, Marion, Multnomah, Sherman and Wheeler in Oregon, and Klickitat and Skamania in Washington) for the 2025 crop year. This designation will allow USDA's Farm Service Agency to extend emergency credit under 7 U.S.C. §§ 1961 and 1942 to family-farm operators substantially affected by this natural disaster who cannot otherwise secure critical capital through private financing sources. Though not a panacea, these disaster loans could help some growers reach the end of the 2026 harvest. Where the 30-percent production-loss threshold under 7 C.F.R. § 759.5(c) is not squarely met, I ask that USDA proceed through the County and State Emergency Board pathway under § 759.5(b) and apply the discretionary authority under § 759.5(d), in light of the unusual quality and marketability nature of these losses and the undue hardship this pest has imposed on a defined segment of our growers.
2. **Ensure that Gorge pear growers reach the market relief USDA already administers.** Specifically, confirm that Hood River pear producers are eligible for, and promptly paid under, the Assistance for Specialty Crop Farmers program; direct additional purchases of Northwest pears under Section 32 (7 U.S.C. § 612c), an authority devoted principally to perishable, non-basic commodities such as pears, to clear the post-Del Monte surplus, building upon USDA's prior purchase of Bartlett pears; explore discretionary disaster relief or market stabilization pathways to the maximum extent possible; and open the application window and publish a timeline for the fruit and vegetable funds reserved within the broader agricultural trade-relief package, so that growers may plan accordingly.

Secretary Rollins  
July 2, 2026  
Page 3

The permanent disaster programs do not fully fit specialty crop production in Oregon. The Tree Assistance Program does not indemnify production loss, and traditional crop insurance will not indemnify losses realized so far after harvest. I ask that all program implementation account for these losses to the maximum extent allowable by statute so that relief reaches the producers who need it most.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) stands ready to coordinate with the FSA Oregon State Office and the State Emergency Board to complete the Loss Assessment Report and to serve as a point of contact. If additional disaster relief funding is available in the form of individual block grants, ODA is prepared to expeditiously administer those funds. I have designated John Boyes ([john.boyes@oda.oregon.gov](mailto:john.boyes@oda.oregon.gov)) as the State's lead for this request. Rural communities and economies are dependent on your leadership and action in times of need.

Thank you for your urgent review, and I look forward to a favorable reply and to your continued support for Oregon's family farmers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tina Kotek". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tina" and last name "Kotek" clearly distinguishable.

Governor Tina Kotek