

ASSEMBLY, No. 5587

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

222nd LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED OCTOBER 5, 2026

Sponsored by:

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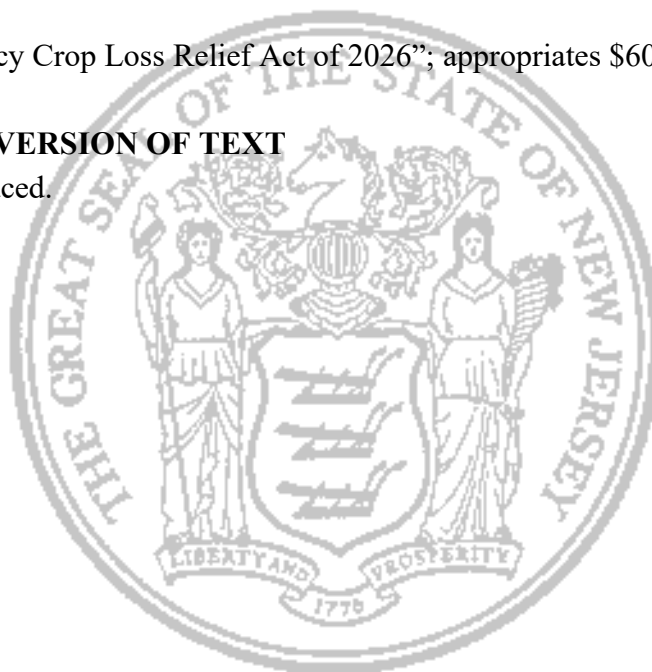
**Assemblywoman Flynn, Assemblymen Clifton, Myhre, Guardian, Kanitra,
McGuckin and Assemblywoman Dunn**

SYNOPSIS

“Emergency Crop Loss Relief Act of 2026”; appropriates \$60 million.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 10/5/2026)

1 AN ACT concerning agricultural crop loss relief and making an
2 appropriation.

3
4 **BE IT ENACTED** *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State*
5 *of New Jersey:*

6
7 1. This act shall be known, and may be cited, as the
8 “Emergency Crop Loss Relief Act of 2026.”

9
10 2. a. The Legislature finds and declares that:

11 (1) Catastrophic and unprecedented damage to New Jersey’s
12 agricultural sector was caused by the extreme cold temperatures and
13 harvest crop freeze from April 19, 2026 through April 22, 2026.

14 (2) The timing and severity of the freeze not only reduced
15 expected horticultural and agricultural crop yields; in many
16 instances, it destroyed entire fields, orchards, vineyards, and
17 cropland within a matter of hours.

18 (3) This damage was widespread and affected multiple
19 agricultural commodities grown throughout the State. In several
20 regions, the damage is expected to be season-ending for key crops,
21 threatening the continued operation of farms that depend upon a
22 single growing season for annual revenue.

23 (4) On May 20, 2026, the Governor declared a resultant State of
24 Emergency across all 21 counties in response to the extraordinary
25 agriculture losses caused by the freeze, estimating that growers and
26 farmers throughout New Jersey could suffer \$300 million in total
27 crop losses. Many farmers recorded losses exceeding 30 percent,
28 with some anticipating 100 percent crop loss.

29 (5) The United States Secretary of Agriculture recognized this
30 disaster declaration, designating all 21 counties in New Jersey
31 natural disaster areas, and extending emergency loan credit to meet
32 various recovery needs.

33 (6) The April freeze imposed an immediate and severe financial
34 burden on New Jersey’s farming families and agricultural
35 businesses. Farmers incurred substantial costs for labor, fertilizer,
36 equipment, irrigation, pest management, pruning, harvesting,
37 packing, and other inputs for crops that were subsequently damaged
38 or destroyed. Those able to replant have had to adjust and delay
39 crop harvesting schedules.

40 (7) Many farmers continue paying operating expenses, debt
41 obligations, property taxes, insurance premiums, and employee
42 wages, despite having little or no marketable crop from which to
43 generate revenue.

44 (8) Farmers have also been forced to alter or abandon harvesting
45 schedules, absorb the cost of removing damaged crops, replant
46 where possible, and prepare for the next growing season, all without
47 a season of incoming income.

1 (9) Farm operations require continued financial assistance to
2 preserve a State economic engine, which generates over \$1.5 billion
3 in wholesale value across sectors, producers, and sellers, and
4 employs about 25,000 State residents.

5 (10) According to a Rutgers University economic impact study,
6 New Jersey's agricultural sector contributed \$2.1 billion to the
7 State's economy in 2017, supporting 31,231 jobs and generating
8 \$96.1 million in tax revenue for the State and local governments.

9 (11) The loss of an entire growing season for significant
10 portions of the State's agricultural industry threatens farm
11 employees, suppliers, equipment dealers, processors, distributors,
12 farm markets, wineries, restaurants, and other businesses that
13 depend upon a reliable in-State agricultural industry.

14 (12) Without prompt and meaningful assistance, otherwise
15 viable farms may be forced to curtail operations, delay planting,
16 reduce their workforce, sell productive farmland, or cease
17 operations altogether.

18 (13) Agricultural businesses that have suffered extraordinary
19 hardships and have made every effort to mitigate their exposure to
20 similar disasters deserve additional grant relief. Eligibility for
21 grants should be based on economic hardship, the extent of the
22 damage or loss, and preventative measures taken in the past to
23 mitigate damages.

24 b. Therefore, the Legislature determines that it is in the public
25 interest to provide financial assistance to farm operations
26 recovering from the catastrophic agricultural damage of the April
27 2026 crop freeze. Prompt assistance is necessary to prevent the loss
28 of otherwise viable farms, preserve New Jersey's agricultural
29 capacity, protect jobs and related businesses, sustain the State's
30 food supply, and ensure that the Garden State's farming community
31 can continue producing crops in future growing seasons.

32
33 3. As used in this act:

34 "2026 Freeze and Crop Loss Relief Dedicated Fund" or "Fund"
35 means the fund established pursuant to subsection a. of section 4 of
36 this act.

37 "April 2026 Freeze" means the unseasonably warm temperatures,
38 followed by extreme cold temperatures, and resultant crop freeze,
39 that occurred in the State of New Jersey between April 19, 2026 and
40 April 22, 2026.

41 "Department" means the New Jersey Department of Agriculture.

42 "Farm operations" mean any agricultural businesses connected to
43 the commercial growing, harvesting, processing, producing, or
44 raising of agricultural products in the State, including crops, dairy
45 animals, livestock, fur-bearing animals, poultry, bees, crops used in
46 fermented alcoholic beverages and wine, and any products
47 therefrom, including organic agricultural products; aquacultural
48 products; horticultural products; and silviculture products.

1 4. a. There is established in the department a nonlapsing
2 dedicated fund to be known as the “2026 Freeze and Crop Loss
3 Relief Dedicated Fund.” The amount appropriated to the fund
4 pursuant to section 5 of this act may be used for, but need not be
5 limited to:

6 (1) grants or other forms of financial assistance to farm
7 operations for demonstrated land damage or crop loss incurred as a
8 result of the April 2026 Freeze; or

9 (2) the provision of relief to agricultural businesses for those
10 crop losses, land damages, and situations not covered by existing
11 federal, State, or local government aid programs.

12 b. The Secretary of Agriculture shall adopt criteria for the
13 administration of the fund and the disbursement of funds therefrom,
14 under a temporary “Freeze Crop Loss Relief Program” established
15 in the department. The criteria of the program shall provide that:

16 (1) funds from the dedicated fund may be used for any damage
17 or loss which is not met by any other governmental funding source;

18 (2) preference for the disbursement of monies from the
19 dedicated fund, pursuant to this section, is given to farm operations
20 that incurred greater than 25 percent verifiable or reliably
21 measurable agricultural loss from prior-year sales revenue or crop
22 production, by individual commodity, as a result of the April 2026
23 freeze; and

24 (3) eligibility for grant awards shall be proportionate to the level
25 of financial need, the magnitude of the damage or loss, the extent of
26 damage to specialty or long-recovery crops, and any other
27 qualification and application criteria as may be established by the
28 department, with due attention paid to distributing the financial
29 assistance equitably throughout the freeze-impacted areas of the
30 State, to the maximum extent practicable and feasible.

31 c. Under the Freeze Crop Loss Relief Program, the Secretary of
32 Agriculture shall establish:

33 (1) an expedited grant application process;

34 (2) a documentation procedure for grant-funded activities by
35 farm operations, to be included in the final program report
36 submitted to the Legislature and the Governor, pursuant to section 6
37 of this act;

38 (3) a grant award allocation method, which is considerate of an
39 agricultural operation’s level of proportionate need, and which
40 establishes a maximum award limit for each recipient; and

41 (4) a method for verifying claims of land damage, crop loss, or
42 extent of financial need with existing information and data available
43 through the United States Department of Agriculture’s Farm
44 Service Agency.

45 d. No later than 30 days after the date of enactment of this act,
46 the Secretary of Agriculture shall publish on its Internet website the
47 availability of the grants authorized pursuant to this act, establish
48 any administrative processes necessary for the disbursement of the

1 monies in the 2026 Freeze and Crop Loss Relief Dedicated Fund,
2 and commence accepting applications from interested farm
3 operations.

4 e. Notwithstanding any provision of the "Administrative
5 Procedure Act," P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.), to the
6 contrary, the Secretary of Agriculture is authorized to adopt,
7 immediately upon filing with the Office of Administrative Law,
8 rules and regulations necessary to implement this act. The rules and
9 regulations adopted pursuant to this section shall be effective for a
10 period not to exceed 18 months following the date of filing and may
11 thereafter be amended, adopted, or readopted by the Secretary of
12 Agriculture in accordance with the requirements of P.L.1968, c.410
13 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.).
14

15 5. There is appropriated from the General Fund to the
16 Department of Agriculture, to be deposited into the "2026 Freeze
17 and Crop Loss Relief Dedicated Fund" established pursuant to
18 section 4 of this act, the sum of \$60,000,000.
19

20 6. No later than one year after the date of enactment of this act,
21 the Secretary of Agriculture shall submit a written report, to the
22 Governor, and to the Legislature pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991,
23 c.164 (C.52:14-19.1), detailing the disbursement of monies
24 authorized pursuant to this act and making a recommendation as to
25 whether there is a need to provide additional assistance beyond that
26 provided by this act.
27

28 7. This act shall take effect immediately.
29
30

31 STATEMENT 32

33 This bill establishes the nonlapsing "2026 Freeze and Crop Loss
34 Relief Dedicated Fund" in the Department of Agriculture
35 (department) and appropriates \$60 million from the General Fund to
36 the dedicated fund. From the "2026 Freeze and Crop Loss Relief
37 Dedicated Fund," the department would provide grants or other
38 forms of financial assistance to farm operations for the purposes of
39 crop freeze and loss relief, which are not addressed by existing
40 federal, State, or local government financial aid or relief. These
41 grants would then be distributed to agricultural businesses, with
42 priority given to businesses that incurred greater than 25 percent
43 verifiable or reliably measurable agricultural loss from prior-year
44 sales revenue or crop production, by individual commodity, as a
45 result of the April 2026 freeze. Eligibility for grants is to be
46 proportionate to the level of a farm operation's financial need, the
47 magnitude of the damage or loss, the extent of damage to specialty
48 or long-recovery crops, and any other qualification and application

1 criteria, as may be established by the department. The department
2 would be directed to pay due attention to distributing financial
3 assistance equitably throughout the freeze-impacted areas of the
4 State, to the maximum extent practicable and feasible.

5 Under the Freeze Crop Loss Relief Program, the Secretary of
6 Agriculture would be directed to establish: (1) an expedited grant
7 application process; (2) a documentation procedure for grant-funded
8 activities by agricultural businesses, which would be included in the
9 final program report submitted to the Legislature and the Governor;
10 (3) a grant award allocation method, considerate of a farm
11 operation's level of proportionate need, with a maximum award
12 limit for each recipient; and (4) a method for verifying claims of
13 land damage, crop loss, or extent of financial need with information
14 or data available through the United States Department of
15 Agriculture and Farm Service Agency.

16 Within one year following the date of enactment, the Secretary
17 of Agriculture would be required to submit a report to the Governor
18 and the Legislature, detailing the disbursement of resources from
19 the "2026 Freeze and Crop Loss Relief Dedicated Fund," and make
20 a recommendation as to whether there is a need to distribute
21 additional assistance beyond that provided by this bill.

22 The Legislative impetus to offer grant and financial assistance to
23 agricultural operations responds to the unprecedented damaged
24 incurred to New Jersey's agricultural sector, caused by the extreme
25 cold temperatures and crop freeze that occurred between April 19,
26 2026, through April 22, 2026. The timing and severity of the freeze
27 reduced expected horticultural and crop yields, affecting multiple
28 agricultural commodities grown throughout the State. On May
29 20th, 2026, the Governor declared a resultant State of Emergency
30 across all 21 counties in response to the extraordinary agriculture
31 losses caused by the freeze, anticipating that growers and farmers
32 throughout New Jersey could suffer at least \$300 million in total
33 crop losses. The emergency declaration was later recognized by the
34 United States Department of Agriculture. The April 2026 freeze
35 imposed an immediate and severe financial burden on New Jersey's
36 farm operations. Farmers incurred substantial sunk costs for labor,
37 fertilizer, equipment, and other inputs for crops that were
38 subsequently damaged or destroyed. Many farmers continue paying
39 operating expenses, property taxes, and employee wages, despite
40 having little or no marketable crop from which to generate revenue.
41 Agricultural businesses require continued financial assistance to
42 preserve an engine of the State economy, which produces over \$1.5
43 billion in wholesale value across sectors, producers, and sellers, and
44 employs about 25,000 State residents.