

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3203

June 8, 2026

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

Dear Secretary Rollins:

I respectfully urge the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agriculture Marketing Service to utilize its authority under Section 32 of the Agriculture Act of 1935 to conduct a bonus buy purchase of surplus Concord grape juice as soon as possible. I write in full support of the May 19, 2026 request made by the New York Wine & Grape Foundation, New York Farm Bureau to USDA to conduct this bonus buy. This critical bonus buy is urgently needed as Refresco's sudden exit from the grower market threatens to leave many Concord grape growers across Western New York and the Finger Lakes region without a buyer for their crop.

In March 2026, Refresco, one of the largest processors of Concord and Niagara grapes in the Lake Erie region, abruptly cancelled grower contracts effective with the fall 2026 harvest. Approximately 126 growers, representing roughly 2,600 acres of primarily Concord grapes, received termination notices after already investing in pruning, tying, and preparing their vineyards for the season. Many of these growers contracted exclusively with Refresco and, without a buyer, now face the prospect of scaling back vineyard maintenance, suspending operations, or abandoning Concord grape production entirely.

This disruption compounds an already fragile market marked by declining grape juice consumption, rising carryover inventories, and downward pressure on grower prices. New York growers based in the Finger Lakes region and Western New York are especially exposed: Chautauqua County alone contains more grape acreage than the rest of New York State combined, and the Lake Erie Grape Belt supports farm families, processors, transportation networks, equipment suppliers, and small-town economies across the shoreline.

I have consistently advocated for the use of Section 32 bonus buys for our New York vineyards and have seen their success in prior years to divert surplus Concord grape juice, stabilize grower prices, and provide nutritious, American-grown grape juice to domestic food assistance programs. Last year, I advocated for a Section 32 bonus buy for New York vineyards, which USDA completed in January 2026. This relief was critical to keeping a vital industry in Upstate New York alive, and more help is needed in light of recent developments. Given the severity of Refresco's exit and the approaching 2026 harvest, I strongly urge USDA to proceed with an accelerated Section 32 bonus buy sized to meet the scale of this disruption.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I respectfully request to be kept informed of USDA's efforts to assist the Concord grape industry.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Charles Schumer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Charles" and last name "Schumer" clearly legible.

Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator