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Governor asks USDA to declare local disaster

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The Daily Journal

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger asked the federal government Tuesday to designate Mendocino County a disaster area due to freezing temperatures and drought conditions in January that stunted rangeland feed growth.

"Though the full effect of the freezing and drought conditions may not be realized until a later time, current estimates are reflecting a 38 percent loss to range land and pasture," Schwarzenegger wrote in a letter to U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns.

According to the letter, preliminary surveys of county ranchers indicate that agricultural damage and loss estimates exceed \$1.8 million.

"This damage will be devastating to affected producers, farm-related businesses and the general economy of the county," Schwarzenegger wrote.

The governor's request Tuesday also included San Diego County, which has an estimated loss exceeding \$114 million.

According to the California Office of Emergency Services, Schwarzenegger has now requested that the U.S. Department of Agriculture designate 24 counties disaster areas, 18 of which have already been granted. Mendocino is currently among the 29 California counties designated as contiguous disaster counties by the USDA.

In addition, on Monday, Schwarzenegger, Sen. Barbara Boxer and Sen. Dianne Feinstein sent a letter to President Bush asking him to immediately grant federal disaster declarations for 31 counties, including Mendocino. Schwarzenegger initially sent a letter to Bush in early

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February requesting the declaration of major disasters for all counties that suffered catastrophic losses due to the extreme cold weather.



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