

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 5, 2014

Secretary Tom Vilsack  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We write regarding the urgent need for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to expedite implementation of the livestock disaster programs reauthorized in the 2014 Farm Bill.

In 2012, U.S. grazing livestock producers experienced the most devastating loss of pasture, rangeland and forage in decades due to the widespread drought, which resulted in more than 80 percent of all U.S. counties determined as “abnormally” to “exceptionally” dry by the U.S. Drought Monitor. By August 2012, you had designated more than 1,400 counties in 33 states as disaster counties due to drought. For New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, and California, this extreme drought has continued into the subsequent years resulting in state-wide herd size reductions of as high as 50 percent. Much-needed financial assistance to cover a portion of these losses will be available to eligible livestock producers under the 2014 Farm Bill’s reauthorized Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP).

In October 2013, winter storm Atlas, an unexpected early fall blizzard, killed more than 20,000 cattle, sheep, horses and bison in the Dakotas and Nebraska, leaving many livestock producers with less than 50 percent of their livestock herds surviving. The 2014 Farm Bill’s Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) is the only economic assistance available to most of these livestock producers, who, without it, will be unable to adequately rebuild their herds and sustain their ranching operations.

The 2008 Farm Bill Disaster Title authorized and funded the LFP, LIP, and other disaster programs, for which USDA published regulations, developed policy and software, and implemented. These programs and their funding authorization expired September 30, 2011.

Final passage of the 2008 Farm Bill occurred on June 18, 2008. LIP signup began July 13, 2009, which was one year and 25 days after final passage of the 2008 Farm Bill. LFP signup began September 14, 2009, which was one year, two months and 27 days after final passage of the 2008 Farm Bill.

The LIP and LFP policies and program parameters included in the 2014 Farm Bill changed very little from the LIP and LFP authorized in the 2008 Farm Bill, with changes including minor adjustments to payment rates in both programs. Additionally, these programs remained nearly identical in both Senate and House Farm Bills throughout Agriculture Committee consideration and passage on the Senate and House floor.

Because LFP uses the U.S. Drought Monitor to determine county eligibility and whether payments will be made for one, two, or the maximum of three months, this eligibility information should already be determined by USDA for 2012 and 2013 losses.

Due to the magnitude of pasture, forage, and livestock losses and the urgent need for financial assistance these losses have created, we strongly urge you to place implementation of 2014 Farm Bill livestock disaster programs as a top priority. Considering the similarities of the 2008 and 2014 Farm Bill LIP and LFP, it is our expectation and request that USDA implement these programs within a much shorter timeframe than it did after passage of the 2008 Farm Bill.

We request that you provide us with the current status of LIP and LFP implementation including the timeframe for policy and software development, rulemaking, signup, and issuance of payments by February 19, 2014. Our livestock producers and their lenders need this information so they can plan accordingly.

Thank you for your timely response to this request, and we look forward to working with you as USDA implements this Farm Bill.

Sincerely,

John Thune

Max Baucus

Tim Wirth

Amy Klobuchar

Heidi Heitkamp

Jim Johnson

Mark Warner

Al Franken

Tom Udare

Pat Roberts

John Bozeman

Dick Durbin

August King -

John Barrasso

Jon Tester

Mazie Hirono

James McCarley

Roy Blunt

Jerry Moran

Mike Enzi

Deb Fischer

Mark F. B. I

Paul Uddall Gene McCasill