

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4105

October 18, 2016

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

I write today concerning a devastating wildfire that has burned more than 31,000 acres in Western South Dakota and to date is not fully contained.

The fire started Sunday, October 16, in an area near Interstate 90 between Wall and Kadoka, which was under a National Weather Service Red Flag Warning for low humidity, high winds, and high temperature. Due to high, gusty winds of more than 50 miles per hour, the fire spread quickly across thousands of acres and destroyed hay, fences, winter pastures, livestock, and outbuildings that were in its path.

The Cottonwood Fire is in the heart of the area that was devastated just three years ago by winter storm Atlas, which killed more than 44,000 head of livestock in Western South Dakota. The Farm Service Agency (FSA) was exceptionally responsive in implementing the livestock disaster programs following winter storm Atlas, and I appreciate the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) making livestock disaster program delivery a top priority after passage of the 2014 Farm Bill.

Once again, the producers in this area urgently need timely assistance from USDA due to the devastating feed and livestock losses caused by the Cottonwood Fire, and I strongly urge you to take whatever action necessary to provide assistance to these producers through FSA disaster assistance programs, including the Livestock Forage Program, the Livestock Indemnity Program, the Emergency Conservation Program, and the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honey Bees, and Farm-raised Fish Program.

In addition, I urge continued coordination between FSA and the South Dakota State Department of Agriculture to ensure ranchers in the Cottonwood Fire area are provided the opportunity to obtain any remaining hay donated as a result of Conservation Reserve Program mid-contract management.

Thank you for your timely consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



JOHN THUNE
United States Senator