

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4105

<http://www.thune.senate.gov>

April 4, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

I write to bring to your attention provisions of the 2018 farm bill that aim to strengthen the U.S. Drought Monitor, with one of its critical functions determining livestock grazing loss assistance thresholds.

During the lengthy 2017 drought that plagued Western South Dakota, I heard from a number of producers that were concerned with the accuracy of the Drought Monitor, especially given its use in determining grazing disaster assistance through programs administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA). Additionally, I heard from producers frustrated that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) was not fully utilizing data gathered by existing reporting stations in determining indemnities for insured grazing losses under the Pasture, Rangeland, Forage Insurance Program administered by the Risk Management Agency (RMA).

The 2018 farm bill includes provisions to help address these issues. Specifically, Sec. 12512 of the 2018 farm bill requires USDA to coordinate with relevant agencies to improve the accuracy of the Drought Monitor. It also requires USDA to use consistent data to the maximum extent practicable for programs that are based on drought and precipitation data. Sec. 12512 also requires a review of the data utilized by the Drought Monitor followed by utilization of additional data identified by the review.

As you continue working on farm bill implementation, I request that you prioritize the aforementioned provisions in the applicable mission area, especially as we approach the summer months when accuracy of the Drought Monitor will be critical for producers.

In addition, I request that the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) coordinate with FSA and RMA when establishing annual carrying capacities on USFS grazing lands to ensure that carrying capacities are consistent and commensurate with grazing loss assistance offered by FSA and RMA. This would eliminate situations in the past when FSA and RMA determined that drought conditions were not severe enough to trigger livestock grazing loss assistance, yet the USFS reduced carrying capacities in the same area on its grazing lands.

I appreciate your commitment to the timely implementation of the 2018 farm bill. Thank you for your attention to these requests. Please feel free to contact me or my staff if we can be of assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John Thune", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

JOHN THUNE  
United States Senator