

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4105

April 16, 2018

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

As a result of recent storms across portions of the United States, including South Dakota, I write this letter to bring to your attention a potential urgent need for Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) assistance for farmers and ranchers.

A series of winter storms, which included freezing rain, sleet, snow, and high winds, moved across South Dakota in March and April. The most recent and most severe winter storm, Xanto, began April 13, 2018, in the Northern Plains with high winds and record snowfall reports, and it has spread across the Great Lakes and Interior Northeast.

March and April are peak lambing and calving months for most livestock producers. As a result, this year's multiple adverse and disastrous weather conditions, including winter storm Xanto, have taken their toll on newborn and very young livestock in several states. Cycles of warm weather, followed by muddy conditions, freezing rain, snow, ice-covered coats on cattle, and erratic feeding during blizzards all exacerbate weather-related diseases such as pneumonia and scours, despite incredible efforts by livestock owners to fight the weather and disease challenges to save their animals. Livestock deaths from scours, pneumonia, and other storm-related causes can occur days or even weeks after a weather disaster, again, despite the best on-the-ground and management efforts by livestock owners.

LIP provides critical economic assistance to livestock producers who experience higher-than-average death losses due to natural disasters. However, I have received reports in the past from livestock producers who have been denied assistance under LIP from U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) headquarters for weather-related livestock death losses. In these cases, FSA cited lack of proper management protocols and failure to vaccinate or properly care for livestock before, during or after a weather disaster event that has resulted in livestock deaths.

Mr. Secretary, I am very concerned that the livestock producers who have been tirelessly fighting mud, snow, ice, and wind during this critical birthing season are not only facing higher-than-normal death losses, but also prices in the market that are below production costs. Without adequate and timely assistance that LIP can provide, current death losses may drive many livestock producers out of business, a scenario USDA can help prevent.

I am requesting that you allow a statement or certification from a licensed veterinarian that a LIP applicant's livestock died due to a weather-related cause, in addition to the currently required documentation for weather-related death losses for LIP verification and eligibility purposes. In addition, I am requesting that you allow the approval for LIP applications to be made by the FSA County Committee (COC), with final approval made by the FSA State Committee (STC). Local veterinarians, COC's, and STC's are much closer to and aware of local weather and livestock conditions and are considerably more familiar with the management practices of applicants than Washington, D.C. personnel, and they are far better able to make accurate determinations of eligibility for LIP.

I appreciate the efforts you and your staff are making for U.S. agriculture and our farmers and ranchers. In light of the current economic agricultural climate, I urge you to administratively incorporate the LIP changes I am requesting and allow veterinarian certification of cause of death loss and FSA STC final approval for LIP applications. Both changes would greatly assist livestock producers who once again this year are suffering livestock losses due to adverse weather. I have introduced legislation with these recommendations that I hope to include in the upcoming farm bill.

Thank you for your timely attention to this request.

Sincerely,



JOHN THUNE  
U.S. Senator