

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4105

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

June 27, 2017

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

Over the past few days, I have been contacted by several South Dakota producers who have been notified by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) that they are required to conduct mid-contract management on certain practices enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

In an FSA county newsletter, South Dakota producers were notified that, "Producers scheduled to do their mow/bale mid-term management this fall will have to destroy the hay, and an FSA employee will have to witness the destruction. Please contact the office prior to destroying to make sure an FSA employee is available."

Why does FSA Headquarters simultaneously offer assistance to livestock producers by opening land enrolled in CRP for emergency grazing in drought-impacted areas and then require land enrolled under certain CRP practices across the state to be mowed, baled, and the bales destroyed? These CRP participants are being required to destroy hundreds, if not thousands, of tons of hay that could otherwise be used for livestock feed in drought-stricken areas of the state.

In response to the devastating drought that has affected a large area of South Dakota, I recently sent you a letter requesting the release of more than 484,000 acres of "environmentally sensitive" CRP-enrolled land in South Dakota for emergency haying and grazing. I appreciate the actions you recently took to assist livestock producers by releasing CRP in D2 (Severe) and D3 (Extreme) designated counties for emergency grazing.

According to the June 23, 2017, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) press release, "Eligible CRP participants can use the acreage for grazing their own livestock or may grant another livestock producer use of the CRP acreage. There will be no CRP annual rental payment reductions assessed for acres grazed."

While I appreciate the availability of emergency grazing on CRP-enrolled land in counties designated D2 and D3, the livestock feed situation in South Dakota is so urgent that additional action by USDA to make feed available from CRP-enrolled land is a necessity.

Authorizing emergency haying and grazing on environmentally sensitive land is critically important to boosting feed supplies, as was done by USDA in 2012. Expanding emergency haying and grazing to all counties in which any part of their border lies within 150 miles of any portion of a county approved for emergency haying or grazing, as was done by USDA in 2006, could make even more feed available.

To further assist livestock producers suffering from the devastating drought, I request that you:

- Immediately withdraw the requirement that hay removed as a result of mid-contract management on certain CRP practices be destroyed, and allow any hay harvested as a result of CRP mid-contract management be used for a participant's own use or by another livestock producer with no reduction in the CRP rental payment.
- Allow emergency haying and grazing on all CRP practices, including for all grass cover practices currently not authorized for emergency haying and grazing provisions.
- Authorize emergency haying and grazing of CRP for all counties in which any part of their border lies within 150 miles of any portion of a county approved for emergency haying or grazing of CRP.
- Require no CRP rental rate deduction for contracts approved for emergency haying or grazing, which would be consistent with the June 23, 2017, USDA announcement.
- Allow CRP participants to use feed for their own use or by another livestock producer from all CRP-enrolled land released for emergency haying or grazing.

Acres enrolled in all grass-cover practices that are currently not authorized for emergency haying and grazing provisions were released for emergency haying and grazing in 2012. We are facing similar drought conditions this year, and the timely release of these acres for emergency haying and grazing would eliminate the need for destruction of hay removed from these acres as now required by FSA under mid-term management.

Thank you for your timely consideration of my request.

Sincerely,



JOHN THUNE
U.S. Senator