

United States Senate

July 26, 2017

The Honorable Sonny Perdue, Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

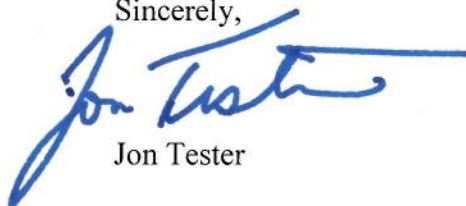
Dear Secretary Perdue:

I write today to urge the United States Department of Agriculture to commit funding assistance and flexibility to farmers, ranchers and rural communities affected by the wildfires currently scorching hundreds of thousands of acres in Montana, displacing families and causing economic hardship. Montana producers are already facing devastating drought conditions that are destroying crops and placing incredible burdens on rural communities. Now, to make matters worse, wildfires are quickly spreading across the prairies, burning fences and structures and consuming the land. There are hundreds of brave men and women out in the field doing tremendous work to fight these fires. Even with their good work, however, the conditions have caused significant losses. It is vital that USDA disaster initiatives are swiftly implemented to assist the rural communities affected by these natural disasters.

I successfully worked with Republicans and Democrats to secure multiple disaster assistance initiatives in the 2014 Farm Bill to aid farmers and ranchers experiencing unforeseen disaster losses. These disaster assistance initiatives, ranging from the Livestock Indemnity Program to the FSA Emergency Loan Program, are critically important to keeping producers in business when disaster hits. In addition, The Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) provides important relief to producers as they begin to rebuild fences and restore damaged fields. The NRCS funds are made available through programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). As farmers and ranchers assess damage and submit claims, I ask that you prioritize their applications and streamline building implementation plans. I also ask that you release additional NRCS funds to farmers and ranchers in the disaster areas.

Thank you for your continued efforts to address the drought crisis in Montana. The announcement that USDA is sending an additional ten FSA employees to Montana is welcome news. I appreciate your consideration of these additional requests and I look forward to continuing to work with you on strengthening rural America.

Sincerely,



Jon Tester