

United States Senate

March 12, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Secretary Perdue:

I write today to request that USDA provide clarity to producers in Montana by expediting review and approval of Montana's 2019 growing season hemp plan. Farmers in Montana have been growing hemp under the pilot program enacted under the 2014 Farm Bill so there is no good reason why they should be blocked from growing this commodity in 2019. But with planting season just weeks away in my state, I am concerned that farmers will be kept from growing hemp due to unnecessary red tape. At a time of great uncertainty for farmers due to trade wars and tariffs, these producers cannot afford to wait any longer for this year's rules regarding hemp cultivation.

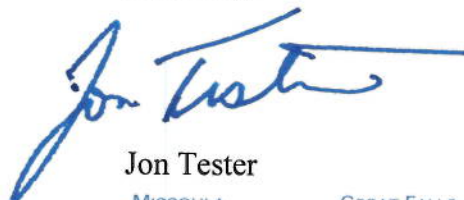
The 2018 Farm Bill removed hemp from the list of Schedule I controlled substances. Easing these regulations makes it legal for producers to grow and sell hemp as a crop. Hemp farmers are now also eligible for crop insurance. I am hearing from Montana producers that this change presents a window of opportunity and many are expressing strong interest in growing hemp this season.

However, USDA recently indicated that there will be no federal guidance for planting hemp until 2020. I understand that creating new commodity regulations is a lengthy process, and must be done thoughtfully and carefully. However, if USDA needs one year to create national hemp rules, then I believe the agency is obligated to review and approve state and tribal plans in the interim.

Since the passage of the Farm Bill, states worked with stakeholders, growers, and tribes to create plans that work for their growing environment. As you know, states are the laboratories for democracy. This holds especially true when it comes to agriculture. That is why the 2018 Farm Bill laid out a detailed process for integrating state plans, and mandated that USDA review and approve plans within 60 days of submission. Montana has submitted its hemp plan and failing to review within the 60 day window would defy Congressional intent.

I stand ready to work with USDA on facilitating the implementation of the 2018 Farm Bill, including its provisions on hemp. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Jon Tester