

United States Senate

November 18, 2019

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

Secretary Perdue:

I write today to urge you to provide farmers with the resources and research they need to adapt to climate change. I commend the recent United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Inspector General investigation into climate science suppression, because I share the concerns that USDA is deemphasizing climate change research despite the fact that climate change clearly poses a significant threat to farmers across America.

Every year my wife and I plant wheat, pulses, and other crops on the same 1,800 acres that my family homesteaded in 1916. As the years tick by, the way we farm is changing. A longer growing season means we plant later in the spring, and harvest later in the fall. Increased moisture prevents us from getting seeds in the dirt, and ground-cracking drought puts the crops we did seed at risk. Extreme heat reduces yield, and elevated CO2 cuts down the protein content of the grain.

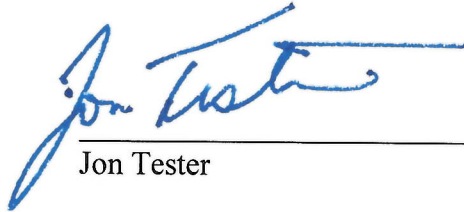
Throughout the 2019 growing season extreme weather battered Montana producers. Spring flooding in Northeast Montana prevented planting, and heavy moisture in the fall significantly slowed harvest. As a result, the few folks who were actually able to harvest a crop were left with unsellable low-quality products. The vast majority of farmers were forced to leave their crop in the ground as combines got stuck in the mud, and early winter snows set in. Montana farming is already challenging, but extreme weather patterns are forcing producers to rethink the way they operate.

USDA agricultural and climate research helps us farmers adapt to these new adverse growing conditions, helping us conserve resources and better manage the land. That's why it is particularly troubling to hear reports that USDA is suppressing climate change research in the name of politics. This does not give folks the feeling that USDA is taking climate change seriously, or that it poses a grave threat to farmers' livelihoods.

Agriculture is the backbone of Montana's economy, so understanding the climate is an economic issue. Lower quality and volume means growers are seeing less return on our product, cutting margins razor thin. It also means that producers depend more heavily on crop insurance, requiring USDA to spend federal funds that could be preemptively invested in climate research.

If we want to protect rural America and the small town way of life of family farmers like me, we must make research and education around climate change a priority, not an afterthought. I urge you to disregard the political rhetoric around climate change, and put farmers and ranchers first.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jon Tester". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "J" and a horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Jon Tester