

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 14, 2021

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

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We write to request the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) provide assistance for ranchers facing drought conditions by allowing emergency haying and grazing of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres in North Dakota. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Producers around our state are struggling to mitigate the effects of drought caused by a dry spring and winter. North Dakota received only two inches of precipitation from October to April, the driest for that period since recordkeeping began 127 years ago. Unseasonably warm weather has worsened conditions, with temperatures having already reached triple digits across the state.

The most recent U.S. Drought Monitor shows 99 percent of the state is in drought, with 67 percent in extreme drought category. Most concerning, 18 percent is in exceptional drought, the highest number in more than two decades. As a result, recent USDA Crop Progress reports indicate 67 percent of the state's pasture and rangeland is in very poor or poor condition.

Producers are doing all they can to manage the situation but many have been forced to cull livestock. Across the state, auction barns are scheduling extra sales to handle the dramatic increase in ranchers liquidating inventory. Some producers have already been forced to sell half their herd and are preparing to sell more if conditions do not improve. This is especially devastating for ranchers who have spent decades building and perfecting their herd.

Allowing emergency haying and grazing of CRP acres before August 1 would provide valuable feed for producers and reduce the need to cull cattle. While some CRP acres are currently available for grazing at limited capacity, this will be insufficient to meet forage demand. Additionally, if conditions persist, CRP acres with quality forage will be nonexistent by August, limiting the benefit a producer would receive from haying or grazing.

Rather than delay releasing CRP and potentially losing the nutritional benefits contained in those CRP acres, we urge USDA to assist North Dakota ranchers by allowing emergency haying and grazing before August 1. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter and for your work on behalf of North Dakota farmers and ranchers.

Sincerely,



John Hoeven
U.S. Senator



Kevin Cramer
U.S. Senator



Kelly Armstrong
U.S. Congressman