

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

June 16, 2017

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

Dear Secretary Perdue,

We write to ask that the U.S. Department of Agriculture provide assistance for ranchers in North Dakota by allowing emergency haying of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Despite receiving a small amount of rain last week, the entire Western half of North Dakota is experiencing an extraordinary early season drought, having received less than 40 percent of normal rainfall thus far in June. The central region of North Dakota, from the South Dakota border to the Northern tier of counties, is listed in the “Severe Drought” category of the latest U.S. Drought Monitor. Over half of North Dakota’s pasture and rangeland is listed as being in “Poor to Very Poor” condition in the latest USDA Weekly Weather and Crop Bulletin.

In North Dakota, the effects of this abnormally dry weather on pastures and hay crops have been devastating. Media accounts of herd liquidation at sales barns are common. Many North Dakota ranchers are being faced with having to decide whether to sell valuable assets of their livestock operations. In Dickinson, North Dakota, the month of May was the driest on record, and while recent rains have helped cool temperatures that spiked in the past few weeks, the small amount of precipitation was not enough to offset the amount of moisture needed to encourage the forage growth needed to support cattle herds. The resulting downsizing of herds in North Dakota poses a long-term threat to the viability of the industry in our state especially given that a herd cannot be built overnight.

That is why we urge you to allow emergency haying of CRP acres within the state of North Dakota. While CRP is not traditionally released this early in the season, and the Drought Monitor Index threshold for releasing CRP for haying has not been reached, current circumstances require that the USDA immediately make this resource available. Most areas experiencing this early drought have already lost their hay and many others are in danger of similar outcomes. Rather than delay releasing CRP and potentially losing the nutritional benefits contained in those CRP acres, USDA should take urgent action to assist ranchers in North Dakota who are struggling due to the current early drought.

We thank you for your time and attention to this matter and for the work you do helping farmers and ranchers in North Dakota and across the country. If you have any questions or wish to discuss this issue further, please contact any of our offices.

Sincerely,



JOHN HOEVEN  
U.S. Senator



HEIDI HEITKAMP  
U.S. Senator

KEVIN CRAMER  
U.S. Congressman