

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 15, 2021

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue Southwest
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We write with growing concern regarding the drought conditions in Minnesota. The unusually dry spring season and subsequent lack of summer rainfall has left almost 40% of Minnesota classified under a D2 severe drought. Without additional rainfall soon, these drought conditions across the state will expand and progressively worsen. It is with this in mind that we ask that you consider authorizing emergency haying and grazing of appropriate Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) enrolled lands.

As you know, many of the Western states are experiencing extremely dry conditions and the upper Midwest has not been spared from this widespread drought. These drought conditions will soon cause challenges for Minnesota livestock producers as quality of the second cutting hay harvests and grazing lands deteriorates. To date, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has already authorized 29 counties for emergency hazing and grazing. However, unless access to additional pasturelands are made available, the scarcity and high cost of hay could force farmers and ranchers to liquidate their herds.

In a normal year, CRP enrolled lands are disallowed from grazing and haying during the primary nesting season for game birds like the pheasant, which in Minnesota runs through August 1st. During regional droughts in previous years, the emergency release of appropriate CRP lands before the end of the primary nesting season has given farmers and ranchers the certainty they need to feed their herds and flocks throughout the drought. With current drought conditions quickly worsening across the state, CRP acres could again be used to help alleviate the shortage of hay and available grazing lands for livestock while still promoting programmatic benefits of habitat and wildlife conservation.

As the USDA continues to evaluate the response to the drought, we respectfully ask that you keep Minnesota farmers in mind. Thank you again for your consideration of our request. We look forward to working with you to ensure a quick recovery from the drought.

Sincerely,



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Michelle Fischbach
Member of Congress



Tina Smith
United States Senator



Angie Craig
Member of Congress



Jim Hagedorn
Member of Congress



Pete Stauber
Member of Congress



Tom Emmer
Member of Congress



Dean Phillips
Member of Congress