

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4313

March 14, 2024

HOUSE ARMED SERVICES
COMMITTEE
HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE
HOUSE AGRICULTURE
COMMITTEE
SELECT SUBCOMMITTEE ON
THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC
HOUSE REPUBLICAN WHIP TEAM

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

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

Over the last two weeks, multiple wildfires have taken a significant toll on the agricultural industry and rural communities in the Texas Panhandle and Western Oklahoma. To date, the fires have burned over 1.3 million acres and accounted for the losses of more than 7,000 head of cattle, impacting the livelihoods of every livestock producer and rancher in the area.¹ Additionally, an estimated 4,000 miles of fencing has been destroyed by the flames, displacing thousands more cattle and leaving producers without the necessary resources to sustain their livestock. To prevent additional unnecessary economic hardship for producers, we write today in support of the Texas State Farm Service Agency's (FSA) request to provide additional flexibility for emergency grazing on eligible Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres in Texas during the Primary Nesting Season (PNS) without a reduction in the annual payment to CRP participants.²

While we appreciate your department's work to expand authorization of emergency haying and grazing in all counties in Arkansas, Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Nebraska, New Mexico, Missouri, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming to support the relocation of livestock, the PNS has already begun in Texas, which eliminates critical acres that would provide the most immediate relief to affected producers. The department's current authorization relies on CRP participants hundreds, even thousands of miles away to donate acres, which has created additional barriers to the recovery of our farmers and ranchers, as coordination in different states and transportation will take weeks to facilitate. In this critical moment, it is imperative the United States Department of Agriculture leverage every available resource to support our farmers and ranchers in the aftermath of these devastating fires.

In 2017, in response to numerous wildfires throughout Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas, President Donald Trump authorized emergency grazing on CRP lands located in those states.³ As part of this authorization, the FSA allowed for emergency grazing if performed outside the PNS, as well as within the PNS if no grazing had occurred in the prior two years on such acreage or it was

¹ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/texas-panhandle-wildfires-thousands-cows-dead-total-wipeout-many-local-ranchers/>

² <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1k9njY1sBmlCBIZtVDeGEe8AwNiUnW5Rv/view?usp=sharing>

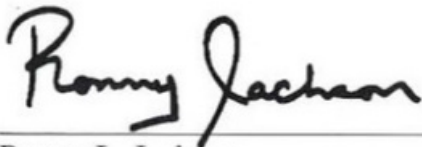
³ <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Emergency-Grazing-on-CRP-Acreage-4-4-2017.pdf>

suitable habitat conditions for birds. The efforts made to allow emergency grazing during the PNS by the Trump administration in 2017 afforded affected farmers and ranchers the necessary flexibility to contain and provide much needed forage for their livestock, while also protecting CRP acres and habitat for migratory birds.

For many operations, the wildfires have taken everything; not only their livestock and pastures, but their homes. Farmers and ranchers that were able to relocate their livestock are in desperate need of additional grazing resources to sustain their animals and begin recovery. CRP participants in Texas are ready and able to provide the necessary relief to these producers, therefore we request your department immediately provide additional flexibility for the use of emergency grazing in Texas during the PNS.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We stand ready to assist in any way possible and look forward to your prompt action in addressing this urgent issue.

Sincerely,



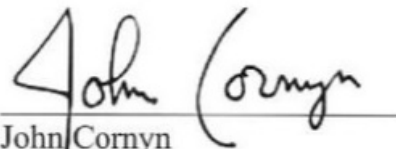
Ronny L. Jackson
Member of Congress



Ted Cruz
U.S. Senator



Jodey C. Arrington
Member of Congress



John Cornyn
U.S. Senator