

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 1, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

Thank you for your efforts to ensure disaster relief provided by Congress reaches our agricultural producers who experienced severe weather-related crop losses in 2020 and 2021. There is no doubt that the disasters of the past few years created unique and unprecedented challenges for American agricultural producers. The congressionally authorized Emergency Relief Program (ERP) remains critical for our farmers' and ranchers' ability to address those unique challenges.

While encouraged by the streamlined and effective approach of your Phase I roll-out, we are deeply concerned with the fundamental changes made in Phase II. We urge you to reconsider ERP Phase II and follow through on the commitments made in Phase I. We also respectfully request USDA utilize the Phase I methodology for the crop year 2022 crop disaster assistance provided by the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023.

Phase I provided straightforward relief where farmers suffered crop losses – consistent with the statutory directives. It also built upon and provided positive incentives for crop insurance and minimized the paperwork burden for FSA employees and the producers they serve. If there is one thing the disasters of the past few years have shown is that we need to be less reliant on ad hoc disaster assistance and instead bolster the traditional farm safety net programs in the farm bill like crop insurance. It is preeminently important that any disaster assistance program continues to encourage the use of crop insurance.

Phase II presents a stark reversal from the gains made in Phase I. It is extremely complicated, requiring new forms and the sharing of personal tax records – information that does not necessarily correlate to crop losses by crop year making Phase II less precise. Even if the producer's all-crop revenue by tax year were to correlate perfectly with crop year losses, which it does not in most cases, the threshold for providing disaster assistance is far less generous, requiring a 30 percent loss across all crops rather than the crop-by-crop analysis of Phase I. Thus, Phase II disadvantages more diversified producers, and in almost all cases will not fulfill the reasonable expectations of producers based on the promises made by USDA in the roll-out of Phase I.

Ultimately, the approach of disaster aid through a complicated whole farm crop revenue analysis is a step backward. Rather than addressing the unfulfilled needs of those who fell through the cracks in Phase I, this approach simply creates an entirely new set of cracks and inequities for the 2020 and 2021 crop years.

We respectfully ask the USDA to follow its original commitment and address the crop losses of our farmers and ranchers who are essential to America's food security. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Jodey C. Arrington
Member of Congress



Tracey Mann
Member of Congress



August Pfluger
Member of Congress




Jake Ellzey
Member of Congress



Barry Moore
Member of Congress



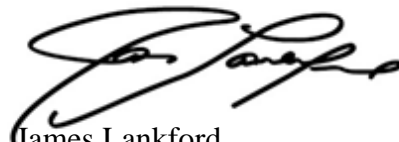
Roger Marshall, M.D.
United States Senator



John Cornyn
United States Senator



Mike Braun
United States Senator



James Lankford
United States Senator



Ron Estes
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Monica De La Cruz
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