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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4319

February 24, 2021

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

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

Congratulations on your recent confirmation as the Secretary of Agriculture. As you know, a recent winter storm and record-low temperatures in Texas caused significant damage to energy infrastructure, households, and agriculture operations across the state. In response to this disaster, I urge you to utilize USDA's vast resources and authorities to bring swift recovery and relief to Texas agriculture producers.

Many rural counties in Texas endured more than thirty consecutive hours without power. This resulted in plants shutting down, livestock loss, and property damages that will take months to recover. For example, Select Milk Producers Inc., a group of family dairy producers, was forced to shut down its processing plant in Lamb County after the plant's natural-gas supplier diverted energy resources to ensure residential homes received uninterrupted heat. This forced Select's dairy farmers to dispose of roughly 8 million gallons of milk, with a wholesale value of over \$12,000,000. The wasted product and damaged machinery will cut into the ability of family farmers to cash flow and be felt by producers for the foreseeable future.

Unfortunately, Lamb County, and many other rural counties, have yet to be included in parts of President Biden's major disaster declaration. While the Texas delegation has urged the inclusion of these counties in receiving aid, it is also critical that USDA uses the tools they have to ensure Texas agriculture producers are able to recover the significant losses which have occurred.

The USDA must make available existing resources by prioritizing Texas producers in assistance programs and extending the Wildfire Hurricane Indemnity Program Plus (WHIP+) to cover losses incurred from the devastating Texas storms. Additionally, it is crucial the Administration unlocks the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program funds or CFAP and begin distributing this important relief to our producers. Our farmers and ranchers are not only the backbone of our economy, but the epicenter of America's food supply and security.

I encourage you to make available USDA's vital assistance to bring relief to Texas farmers, ranchers, and dairy producers. Thank you for your attention and timely consideration of this important matter. In the meantime, please let me know how I can be of assistance.

Sincerely,



Jodey C. Arrington
Member of Congress