TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

TODD STAPLES
COMMISSIONER

April 25, 2011

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

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

According to the April 12, 2011 Drought Monitor, 60.57 percent of Texas' landmass is suffering under extreme drought. As of April 19, 2011, 6,044 wildfires across the state have scorched 1,787,363 acres, destroyed over 743 structures and displaced many residents. Due to these extreme conditions and disastrous fires, loss of livestock, pasture and fences will total in the millions of dollars. In these current economic times, it is imperative that we assist those affected as they rebuild their lives.

I understand USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) office in Texas is sending a request for several more counties to be added to the secretarial disaster designation list for wildfire damages. I am writing in support of this request asking that you quickly approve it so producers in these counties can quickly access FSA Emergency Loans as they search for ways to replace equipment and fences lost in the fires.

Additionally, I request Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) funds be immediately made available for producers in these counties and that Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acreage in these counties and those contiguous counties be immediately released for haying and grazing to assist in recovery efforts. These actions will provide pasture and forage resources for immediate and short-term response and allow farm and ranch land ravaged by these fires to be rehabilitated and placed back in production. For counties receiving the secretarial disaster designation, I ask that the 25 percent reduction in CRP payments for haying and grazing be waived under these circumstances.

I request your most urgent attention to the ongoing devastation in Texas. As with previous disasters, I reiterate my concern that disaster payments, created in the 2008 Farm Bill, will not reach producers in a timely fashion. Assistance must be expedited to ensure that farmers and ranchers are not forced out of the industry by recent wildfires and catastrophic drought affecting every county in Texas.

I look forward to working with you as we continue to assist those affected by prolonged extreme drought and subsequent fires. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I may be of assistance.

Sincerely yours,

Todd Staples

TS/NC/nc

cc: Juan Garcia

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