

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

TODD STAPLES
COMMISSIONER



May 5, 2009

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

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

The month of April saw several devastating fires burn more than 220,000 acres of farm and ranch land in 18 Texas counties. Texas farmers and ranchers lost \$34.4 million worth of cattle, pasture and fences due to this disaster. In these current economic times, it is imperative that we assist those affected as they rebuild their lives.

I request the secretarial disaster designation process be initiated immediately for Archer, Baylor, Callahan, Clay, Cooke, Eastland, Hamilton, Hood, Jack, Montague, Palo Pinto, Parker, Shackelford, Stephens, Wheeler, Wichita, Wise and Young counties as a result of these devastating wildfires. This designation would allow producers in these counties access to 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 made available for producers in these 18 counties and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acreage in these and contiguous counties be released for haying and grazing to assist their neighbors' 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.

Finally, I reiterate my concern that disaster payments created in the 2008 Farm Bill will not reach producers in a timely fashion. The most recent information indicates this money will not be distributed until at least December 2009. The timeline for distribution must be sped up to ensure that farmers and ranchers are not forced out of the industry by disasters like these recent fires and the catastrophic drought affecting every county in Texas.

I look forward to working with you closely as we continue to assist those affected by these fires. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I may be of assistance.

Sincerely yours,

Todd Staples

TS/CJF/me

