

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

TODD STAPLES
COMMISSIONER

June 19, 2013

Mr. W. Craig Fugate
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Administrator Fugate:

Thank you for your service to the people of the United States, and for FEMA's efforts to provide assistance to the people of West, Texas. Your agency's efforts to grant certain individual and public assistance through the emergency declaration are greatly appreciated. While Texans everywhere are thankful for the attention of FEMA and the President, I write today with serious concerns regarding your recent rejection of the City of West's request for a major disaster declaration.

The Stafford Act defines a major disaster as any natural catastrophe or "regardless of cause, any fire, flood or explosion in any part of the United States..." The definition further states a declaration is warranted if the fire or explosion causes damage so severe the cost of recovery is beyond the resources of states, local governments and disaster relief organizations. The West tragedy surpasses this threshold to qualify assistance.

The Texas Department of Agriculture is the state agency responsible for promoting economic and community development in rural Texas. As such, we administer the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG), and assist with disaster recovery in rural areas of the state.

Drought, wildfires and other disasters have taken a toll on Texas for several years. State and local resources have been stressed by efforts to care for constituents and communities that have suffered great losses. We believe strongly in self-reliance and private individuals assisting their neighbors. However, the frequency and magnitude of the disasters, which have occurred over multiple years and for sustained periods of time, have stressed local and state resources, as well as federal resources administered by the state such as the CDBG program.

Further, closer examination of the impact of the fire and explosion on West demonstrates the challenge of recovery. The explosion destroyed homes and businesses, taking away residents' ability to create the jobs and activity that is necessary to facilitate recovery. The West Fertilizer Co. explosion caused significant loss and damage to homes, business, vehicles, local



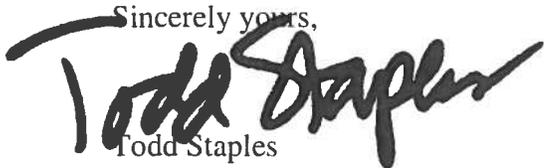
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schools and public infrastructure. The City of West has incurred major damages to the city streets, water lines and sewer systems. The community's middle school was demolished, and two other schools and equipment were severely damaged. Last year, the City of West's annual budget was estimated at \$2 million. The damage caused by the fire and explosion has demolished the tax base and economic activity, meaning less revenue will be available for city operations. Additional disaster assistance from FEMA will be vital in replacing the critical infrastructure necessary to restart economic activity and generate the local tax revenue.

On April 17, 2013, President Barack Obama attended the West memorial service and assured the people of West, the state of Texas and the nation that, "We'll be there even after the cameras leave and after the attention turns elsewhere... Your country will remain ever ready to help you recover and rebuild and reclaim your community."

Denial of West's request for disaster assistance is contrary to this statement, and I urge you to reconsider immediately and deliver the resources to the people of this small community who have no other way to recover. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns. I look forward to working with you in assisting the people of West in recovering from this tragedy.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Todd Staples". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Todd Staples

TS/KHF/khf

cc: The Honorable Barack Obama
The Honorable Rick Perry
The Honorable John Cornyn
The Honorable Ted Cruz
The Honorable Bill Flores
The Honorable Brian Birdwell
The Honorable Kyle Kacal
The Honorable Tommy Muska
Secretary Tom Vilsack
Secretary Janet Natpolitano
Secretary Shaun Donovan
Chief Nim Kidd