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United States Senate

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March 5, 2018

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We appreciate the support that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (Department) provides to producers impacted by natural disasters. We encourage the Department's timely, transparent, and producer-friendly implementation of the disaster authorities and assistance recently provided in Public Law 115-123, The Bipartisan Budget Act.

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) should provide producers reasonable time to evaluate and sign up for programs. Disaster assistance should be administered expeditiously and consistently with comparable previous disaster programs and permanent programs authorized in the Agriculture Act of 2014 (2014 Farm Bill), including compliance with applicable payment limitations, adjusted gross income limits, and conservation requirements. The FSA should provide adequate staff to impacted areas, update employee training and technology resources, and minimize administrative costs during implementation.

During the program sign up period, producers should be informed that they are required to purchase two years of federal crop insurance coverage administered by the Risk Management Agency (RMA) or two years of coverage under the noninsured crop disaster assistance program administered by the FSA. Similar to previous disaster programs, producers should be required to purchase buy up coverage above the catastrophic level. Finally, the RMA should continue to work with producers of affected crops to expand and improve crop insurance policies.

We encourage you to keep the Senate Agriculture Committee informed of the implementation of these provisions, as well as enhancements to risk management tools for cotton and dairy producers. FSA should operate these programs, in a producer-friendly manner and consistent with the timelines in the Bipartisan Budget Act, which includes Margin Protection Program coverage for the full 2018 calendar year.

Sincerely,



Pat Roberts, Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition, and Forestry



Debbie Stabenow, Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition, and Forestry

CC: Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services William Northey
Acting Farm Service Agency Administrator Steven Peterson
Acting Risk Management Agency Administrator Heather Manzano