



UNITED TO GROW FAMILY AGRICULTURE

June 20, 2017

The Honorable Sonny Perdue  
Secretary of Agriculture  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave, SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Secretary Perdue:

We write on behalf of Farmers Union members who are experiencing significant drought in the Upper Great Plains. We urge you to immediately consider emergency haying and grazing on Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land.

Emergency haying and grazing of CRP land is authorized to provide relief to livestock producers in areas affected by a severe drought or similar natural disaster. Farmers Union members in all of North Dakota and parts of South Dakota, Montana, and Minnesota are facing serious drought conditions. The National Drought Mitigation Center currently lists D-1 and D-2 conditions in and around the Missouri River Basin.

Reports from our members have painted an alarming picture of a deteriorating feed supply. While recent rainfall has helped, it has done little to significantly alter conditions in the long term. Ranchers are forced to graze alfalfa stocks before the plants have reached maturity. Although the usual Drought Monitor Index threshold for releasing CRP has not yet been reached, hay is in short supply after the harsh winter. Many producers are left with the difficult choice of downsizing their herd or driving hundreds of miles to purchase hay.

Local media outlets are frequently sharing stories of sales barns that are oversupplied with cattle, causing prices to decline since the spring. Such significant herd downsizing, especially in the context of a flooded market and low prices, threatens the long-term viability of many of these ranches.

We urge you to release CRP land for emergency grazing as soon as possible. Waiting until August to allow producers onto CRP land will provide little relief, as the grass will be of little nutritional value. The window for this decision is short and narrowing each day.

We thank you for your consideration and stand ready to provide any additional assistance.

Sincerely,

Roger Johnson  
President  
National Farmers Union

Doug Sombke  
President  
South Dakota Farmers Union

Gary Wertish  
President  
Minnesota Farmers Union

Mark Watne  
President  
North Dakota Farmers Union

Alan Merrill  
President  
Montana Farmers Union