

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0609

April 30, 2024

The Honorable Martin Heinrich
Chair
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Hoeven
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Heinrich and Ranking Member Hoeven,

We write to urge you to include robust funding for an agricultural disaster program to address 2023 agricultural losses as you begin drafting the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill. We also request that you include the attached legislative text to ensure this funding improves upon former emergency relief payment programs and provides disaster payments equitably and timely.

Recently, the American Farm Bureau Federation estimated that agricultural losses in 2023 exceeded \$21 billion, with roughly half of this amount not covered by crop insurance or the noninsurance crop disaster assistance program. Although the losses reported by Farm Bureau were nationwide, large swaths of the country have endured multiple years of severe and chronic drought that has most recently resulted in one of the worst wildfires in U.S. history.

As fires continue to rage across drought-stricken grasslands every spring, the production losses are compounding for farm and ranch families living and working in these drought regions. While we had hoped the Farm Bill would be modernized and enacted in a way that strengthens the farm safety net to avoid the dramatic need for ad hoc disaster programs, our nations' farmers and ranchers simply cannot afford to wait on its stymied passage.

Given the history of funding from previous disaster programs, farm and ranch families who suffered catastrophic losses in 2022 expected similar relief to come from USDA Emergency Relief Program (ERP) payments. Unfortunately, the current USDA departed from congressional intent and made unworkable and unnecessary changes to the Emergency Relief Program. This unfair implementation deprived full-time farm families from receiving their expected relief. Despite these changes we think Congress should provide needed assistance to farmers and ranchers devastated by natural disasters in 2023. However, it must be done with appropriate guard rails dictated by Congress.

In light of all of this, we respectfully urge you to include a robust agricultural disaster program for 2023 losses in the FY2025 agricultural appropriations bill with the attached legislative text to ensure that the program is not implemented in the same inequitable manner as the 2022 program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Roger W. Marshall". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Roger Marshall, M.D
United States Senator