TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

TODD STAPLES
COMMISSIONER

July 17, 2009

Mr. Juan Garcia
Texas State Executive Director
USDA Farm Services Agency
P.O. Box 2900
College Station, Texas 77841

Dear Mr. Garcia:

On May 5, I wrote Secretary Vilsack seeking various actions to assist agricultural producers in Texas devastated by this year's drought and wildfires. He responded to my letter on June 29 providing information on most of my requests, but one of my requests in particular was disregarded and he evidently is deferring to you on this issue.

In my May 5 letter, I requested, among many other things, that USDA allow emergency haying and grazing of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land in Texas. The Secretary's response was that "The Texas State FSA office has not submitted a request for emergency use…" My office coordinates closely with your qualified staff in the state and local offices of USDA's Farm Services Agency (FSA) and we will continue to do so. Therefore, I request today that you immediately initiate the necessary actions to make a request to Secretary Vilsack for the use of CRP acreage throughout Texas for emergency haying and grazing. With low availability of forage, emergency access to all CRP land in Texas is necessary.

The drought in Texas is taking a historic toll on our farmers and ranchers. Estimates indicate this drought has already cost Texans more than $1 billion and that it is quickly approaching an impact of at least $4 billion.

Virtually all of Texas is experiencing some form of drought. According to the most recent Drought Monitor, nearly 25 percent of the state is in either D3 or D4 drought – the two most severe measures of drought – and South and Central Texas in particular are experiencing the most extreme drought in the country. Many row crop producers were either unable to plant or their crop has been lost since it was planted. Our livestock producers have little to no remaining forage and the cost of supplemental feed is driving them to sell off herds. Even if animals survive this drought, the effects will be felt for years to come in the form of forage recovery and conception rates.

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I request your urgent attention to this dire situation in Texas. This is a long-lasting and devastating drought and it will have historic impacts. I appreciate your commitment to speeding the delivery of disaster assistance programs in the 2008 Farm Bill and urge you to focus your staff even further by bringing that to conclusion now. The partnership Texans have with USDA is valued and I hope to build upon that throughout this on-going disaster.

Sincerely yours,

Todd Staples

TS/DD/lsm

cc: The Honorable Tom Vilsack, USDA Secretary