



June 28, 2019

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

Dear Mr. Secretary,

On June 14, 2019, Ohio Governor Mike DeWine formally requested a USDA Secretarial Disaster Declaration for Ohio because of the record rainfall in many Ohio counties. As Director of the Ohio Department of Agriculture, I urge you to make this designation so that Ohio farmers can access much-needed disaster relief assistance.

Last week, Governor DeWine and I met with 20 farmers representing nine different counties in northwest Ohio. A survey of these farmers indicates that just 15,000 of the 80,000 acres they farm has been planted. Farmers in areas all over the state report similar circumstances. The impact of unplanted acres is far-reaching, affecting not only farmers and agricultural businesses, but entire communities and local economies.

Ohio values our partnership with the USDA and appreciates the assistance that you and your team provide to farmers throughout the state. I know that the Agency, along with the state and local FSA, RMA and NRCS offices, is actively reviewing various regulations and are working cooperatively with Ohio farmers to administer exemption requests where appropriate.

Along those lines, I have received the following specific recommendations from farmers around Ohio. These changes are narrow and can be made immediately so that all farmers harmed by the excessive rainfall can try to prevent further damage.

1. On Prevent Plant acres where cover crops were previously established, provide a one-year exemption that allows for the cover crops to be hayed, grazed, baled, ensiled, and/or harvested, for grain or forage, without date restrictions or a reduction in Prevent Plant payment. This exemption would exclude corn and soybeans, and would limit end uses to bedding, feed or cover crop seed.



2. On Prevent Plant acres, provide a one-year exemption that allows for the establishment of a new crop or cover crop that can be hayed, grazed, baled, ensiled, and/or harvested, for grain or forage, without date restrictions or a reduction in Prevent Plant payment. Again, this exemption would exclude corn and soybeans, and would limit end uses to bedding, feed or cover crop seed.
3. Provide an exemption to allow for the haying or grazing of land set aside as part of the Conservation Reserve Program. The farmer would be responsible for any repair or reestablishment costs.
4. For Beginning Farmers who have been registered as a farmer with the Farm Service Agency for 5 or fewer years, provide a one-year exemption that eliminates total farm Prevent Plant acreage caps. For example, if the county is generally 50% corn and 50% soybeans, the one-year exemption would allow the Beginning Farmer to take 50% of certified acres as Prevent Plant corn and 50% of certified acres as Prevent Plant soybeans. This would give Beginning Farmers with limited crop history realistic limits by crop and total farmed acres.
5. Provide additional funding assistance for planting of cover crops on Prevent Plant acres for erosion control and reduced weed pressure purposes, such as that announced by the NRCS today. This is critical to ongoing water quality efforts in Ohio; without additional immediate assistance, years of efforts to improve soil health and water quality may be wasted.

Thank you for your timely consideration of these requests.

Very respectfully yours,



Dorothy Pelanda
Director, Ohio Department of Agriculture

