



November 1, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue Southwest
Suite 200A
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Thank you for your strong support and concern for our producers, particularly at a time when they have experienced extensive losses after a tumultuous growing season. As your State Farm Service Agency determined, our producers have suffered nearly \$423 million in losses for just the one crop in each county with at least 30 percent loss, and billions of dollars in additional crop and livestock value is still at risk. As a first step to helping them recover, I am formally requesting you issue a Secretarial disaster designation for 47 of our 53 counties.

In this land of extremes, North Dakota and its agricultural producers experienced every possible adverse weather condition during the 2019 growing season. Our State Climatologist, Dr. Adnan Akyuz of the North Dakota State University (NDSU) Agricultural Experiment Station, aptly characterized our growing season as "topsy turvy." In the spring, widespread flooding inundated much of the state, impacting areas seldom subjected to high waters. A cool spring and wet conditions delayed the start of the planting season.

By summer, dry conditions became problematic in north central North Dakota, an area plagued by multiple years of severe drought. Torrential downpours in late summer and fall ameliorated drought conditions, but created a second flood disaster, swamping infrastructure and farmland throughout the state during harvest time. An October 9-12, 2019, storm compounded problems by bringing heavy rain before transitioning to snow containing up to 3 inches of water content equivalent. Nearly 30 inches of snow blanketed prime farmland, decimating unharvested crops. Subsequent rapid snowmelt is now creating an unprecedented third flood this fall in central and eastern North Dakota where communities are battling to mitigate the impacts of runoff in rural areas.

Spring Flooding

In North Dakota, communities begin flood preparations in January, after the first Spring Flood Outlooks are issued by our National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Weather Service (NWS) partners. Initial forecasts looked promising for limited flooding in 2019. However, conditions deteriorated in February after record snowfall resulted in impactful snowmelt, and two major March storms blanketed the state with heavy, wet snow. North Dakotans engaged in extensive flood fight efforts for 39 days, from March 21, 2019, to April 28, 2019, as powerful floodwaters swamped county and township roads, impeding access to lifeline services, and washed out gravel and culverts. Inundated fields and extensive road damage prevented farmers from accessing their lands for several weeks, well past optimal planting times.

Impacts in McKenzie County in western North Dakota exemplified the consequences experienced by producers elsewhere in the state. Flooding along the Yellowstone River displaced 110 Fairview area residents for several days. These residents returned to discover extensive property damage, including homes moved off their foundations and destroyed farm machinery. Area farmers and ranchers also experienced substantial economic losses after floodwaters swamped an estimated 14,482 acres, delaying, and in many cases preventing, spring planting.

Our state received a Presidential Disaster Declaration for 19 counties in western, central and eastern North Dakota. Officials for the North Dakota Department of Emergency Services (NDDDES) placed spring flood damages to our state's transportation system at \$11.5 million. The rural roads our producers rely upon to access their fields accounted for 86 percent of the damaged infrastructure.

Late Summer/Early Fall Torrential Rains

Dr. Akyuz explained that initial forecasts indicated a warmer, drier fall that producers hoped would allow for crop maturation, compensating for the late start to the season. Instead, an El Niño weather pattern gripped the area and substantial rainfall in August and September led to flash floods and ponding of water in agricultural and urban areas, disrupting the harvest cycle.

Attachment A, North Dakota Weather Summary for the Record Wet Period Extending from the Middle of August into Early October 2019, provided by the NWS, underscores Dr. Akyuz's analysis. As stated in the report, September 2019 ranked as the wettest September on record for 125 years of data. The report contains several maps illustrating the level of percent of normal precipitation for the August and September time frames. The August 1, 2019, Monthly Precipitation report for North Dakota shows up to 400 percent of normal, primarily in western and central North Dakota. By September, the entire state was well above percent of normal, ranging from 125 to 600 percent. The combined total of precipitation for August and September 2019 ranked second with 8.54 inches, just 0.04 inches shy of the two-month record for the same

time period set in 1900. This September, our state topped records with 5.69 inches of precipitation.

The Statewide Precipitation Ranks map illustrates the spatial and temporal scales of precipitation within the United States and shows North Dakota recording the wettest September in 125 years. Additionally, NWS meteorologists provided a County Precipitation Ranks map for September 2019 that indicates the entire state was much above average or record wettest for the period from 1895 to 2019. The report also includes September precipitation totals for the state's major cities. September ranked as the wettest on record for Williston, Jamestown, and Grand Forks; the second wettest for Dickinson, Bismarck and Devils Lake; and the seventh wettest for Fargo.

A September 20-21, 2019, storm produced extensive flooding that exacerbated soggy conditions. Heavy rain resulted in road closures across central and eastern North Dakota, including a flooded I-29 near the Red River Valley city of Grand Forks. The city recorded 6.43 inches of rainfall in six hours as heavy runoff blew manhole covers, disrupted sewage operations, and stranded motorists. The overwhelming volume of inflow into Grand Forks and East Grand Forks water treatment plants required bypass operations and limits on residential use. Once back online, treatment plant crews pumped 17 million gallons of water in one day compared to a daily average of 8.5 million gallons. Several hundred homes in Grand Forks flooded when wastewater systems failed to keep pace with inflows and the heavy downpour swamped basements. The Grand Forks Emergency Management Office staff coordinated unmet needs, mental health services and cleanup assistance between nearly 75 vulnerable residents and voluntary agencies. City crews and residents hauled hundreds of tons of water-damaged materials to the landfill.

High winds, hail and heavy rain damaged crops and saturated roads, once again preventing agricultural producers from reaching their lands. Waterways swelled from runoff, overtopping farm-to-market roads. Up to 3.5 inches of rain and hail caused crop damages in Cavalier County in northeastern North Dakota. Residents in the north central farming community of McClusky in Sheridan County reported sewage backup in homes due to an overloaded lift station. Subsequent runoff from nine inches of rain inundated fields and roadways, nearly isolating the City of Bowdon in southern Wells County. Floodwaters swamped an estimated 75 basements in Fessenden and in southern Wells County, with 12 homeowners reporting sewage backup after lift stations failed to keep up with excess water.

Water board members in Wells and Foster counties worried high flows would damage the structural integrity of Rocky Run, Pipestem Creek and Sykeston Dams and would result in downstream damages to farmsteads and transportation systems. North Dakota State Water Commission (NDSWC) engineers found high flows caused erosion behind a Sykeston Dam spillway wall. High inflows prompted NDSWC engineers to suspend outlet pumping operations at Devils Lake, where thousands of acres of prime farmland remain inundated after 26 years of closed-basin flooding. Dam operators across the state, including the United States Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) and the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) have substantially

increased releases from such dams as Heart Butte in the west and the Jamestown and Pipestem Dams in the central parts of the state.

The NWS report contains a 60-day precipitation map, generated on October 10, 2019, as a snowstorm advanced across North Dakota. The map shows major portions of the state well above 300 percent of normal, with several areas reaching 400 to 600 percent of normal. The winter storm created more concerns for significant road damage. As Tammy Roehrich, the Wells County Emergency Manager, conveyed, runoff from the September 20-21, 2019, storm was still flowing over roadways when heavy, wet snow fell in her county, adding to extreme ground saturation.

October Precipitation Event

The intense, historic storm unfolded in two waves with the first event bringing rain that transitioned to sleet and then to up to 1 foot of heavy, wet snow in central and eastern North Dakota during October 9-10, 2019. The second wave on October 10-12, 2019, paralyzed the state with heavy snow and wind speeds of up to 66 miles per hour, creating whiteout conditions and large impassable snow drifts. Local law enforcement and public works officials issued travel advisories, closed roads and pulled snow removal crews. Emergency managers conferred with voluntary agencies about the possibility of establishing shelters. Snowplow operators, farmers, ranchers and law enforcement rescued nearly 100 motorists, including 38 passengers in a bus stranded north of Grand Forks and another 40 occupants in a Greyhound bus near Medina and Cleveland in Stutsman County. A farmer rescued seven hunters stranded north of Michigan in Nelson County. Traill County deputies collaborated with mutual aid partners to conduct a water rescue of two men who drove into a flooded low water crossing and encountered swift currents. The North Dakota National Guard readied eight regional response ground search and rescue teams. Ice and snow buildup caused damage to agricultural and residential buildings as power outages and multiple motor vehicle accidents occurred throughout North Dakota. Bismarck set a record for October snowfall when 11.6 inches fell within a 24-hour period during October 10-11, 2019.

The snowstorm will result in an abrupt and unfortunate end to the 2019 growing and harvest season with greatly reduced yields or total crop losses. Weather reports indicated snowfall of up to 30 inches was concentrated in the heavily agricultural areas of Benson, Cavalier, Eddy, Foster, Pierce, Ramsey, Rolette and Wells counties. "Farmers have received blow after blow this growing season," Dr. Akyuz said. "The heavy snow probably killed unharvested crops."

The wet weather has resulted in much disease and created an inability to harvest remaining cereal grains, soybeans, wheat, barley, potatoes and sugar beets. The growing season also did not provide the necessary growing degree days for crops to reach maturity. High soil moisture content makes it impossible for farmers to harvest their crops. "You can't work the fields," said Allen Schlag, Hydrologist with the NWS Bismarck Office. "When you get soils this wet, they are impassible for wheeled vehicles. You can't disc or seed a field, and you can't drive grain trucks. Equipment gets plugged up." Producers also face an additional challenge of getting crops into a dry-down period. Before the October storm, many producers anticipated the need for natural

gas for mechanical drying of grain, an additional cost when they are already facing substantial financial losses.

Direct Agriculture Impacts

The cumulative impact of these disasters has created havoc for our farmers and ranchers who have been reporting widespread damages to my office, the State Agriculture Commissioner, County Emergency Boards and North Dakota State University Extension offices. Producers of row crops and grains in particular have experienced a devastating blow.

Agriculture Commissioner Goehring and I traveled to the hardest hit areas of the state on October 14, 2019, to listen to producers' concerns as well as those of their communities. Our typically stoic producers shared their concerns about crop damages and crop prices for the few remaining salvageable crops. Our producers reported cattle stranded by floodwaters, crops inundated by flood waters.

As the storm moved eastward across the state on October 11, 2019, Stephanie Sinner, Executive Director of the North Dakota Soybean Council, and Nancy Johnson, Executive Director of the North Dakota Soybean Growers Association, conducted an initial damage assessment with concerned board members and producers. This historic storm threatens soybean yields, the state's top export crop that is nearly equal to wheat planting. At the onset of the storm, only 6 percent of soybeans had been harvested. Rows of soybean lay under the weight of heavy, wet snow at a time when crops ordinarily would have been harvested but for the cool, wet start to the 2019 season. The full extent of this tremendous blow depends on when farmers can reach their fields and determine the best method for harvesting. Plantings were nearly on par with last year's crop, which generated \$2.02 billion for North Dakota. Cass County, hard hit by the storm, is the second highest soybean-producing county in the United States, and North Dakota ranks fourth in the nation for soybean acres planted and harvested. Total production last year amounted to 243.5 million bushels at a per bushel value of \$8.30.

Concerns extend to other aspects of the agricultural economy. In Grant County, Darla Schafer, rancher, banker and president of the North Dakota Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster, indicated sunflower crops and cattle are causing western North Dakota producers the most worry. Sunflowers, with their shallow roots, have been flattened by gusty winds and heavy snow, making harvesting extremely difficult. Area ranchers also worry about falling cattle prices given the volatility in the feeder market.

At a time of year when prairie fires are normally the primary concern, Kidder County Emergency Manager Jim Albrecht reported heavy snow buried edible bean and soybean crops as well as a field of recently swathed sorghum that a producer did not have time to harvest before the storm. Hay bales remain in fields throughout the county since producers run the risk of tractors becoming mired in mud.

Charlotte Beachler, Farm Service County Executive Director (CED) for Kidder County and acting CED for Wells County, notified state officials that many producers unsuccessfully struggled to move cattle to drier locations prior to the snowstorm. As producers assess livestock deaths, they also are calculating the impacts to hay and forage. Ms. Beachler worries the aftermath of the storm will have a devastating impact on the agricultural community.

The State Emergency Board met October 31, 2019, and voted to pursue a Secretarial Disaster Designation. Attachment B, *Preliminary 2019 ND Disaster Designation Requests – 10/31/2019* and Attachment C, *State Emergency Board (SEB) Damage Assessment Report (DAR)* detail the findings of the State Emergency Board. Forty-five counties experienced a 30 percent crop loss: Adams, Benson, Bottineau, Bowman, Burke, Cavalier, Cass, Divide, Dunn, Eddy, Emmons, Foster, Golden Valley, Grand Forks, Grant, Griggs, Hettinger, Kidder, LaMoure, McHenry, McIntosh, McKenzie, Mercer, Mountrail, Nelson, Oliver, Pembina, Pierce, Ramsey, Ransom, Renville, Rolette, Sargent, Sheridan, Sioux, Slope, Stark, Steele, Stutsman, Towner, Traill, Walsh, Ward, Wells and Williams. Two counties met credit survey criteria, Billings and Morton Counties. Six requested a deferral until after harvest. Those counties include: Barnes, Burleigh, Dickey, Logan, McLean and Richland counties.

Infrastructure Impacts

Unable to harvest their crops, our producers have been equally challenged by flooded roads that restrict their access and force them to drive miles out of their way to reach their fields. As Jerry Bergquist, long-time Stutsman County Emergency Manager, reported to the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC), frequent rainfall had a cascading effect that culminated in the October storm and unprecedented fall flooding. "We can't handle it anymore. The rainfall and record snowstorm could be the event that broke the camel's back," Mr. Bergquist said. "Damages to roadways are escalating after the October rain and snowfall. We are losing township roads." Officials are apprehensive about school buses traveling on township roads.

As in other areas of the state, citizens and officials for the City of Jamestown and the county are engaged in a flood fight to battle significant runoff. Officials requested a sandbag machine from the SEOC to help with flood fight efforts. The residents of Jamestown are sandbagging in preparation for high water releases from the Pipestem and Jamestown Dams after the USACE began evacuating flood storage. In adjacent Barnes County, the USACE is also increasing releases from Baldhill Dam as Lake Ashtabula's levels rise.

Like his counterparts throughout the state, Mr. Bergquist worries about the ramifications of fall flooding for the 2020 growing season. The ground is so saturated that runoff next year likely will not percolate through the soils and instead could result in a repeat of widespread overland and riverine fall flooding. "There is no history or precedent for having this much liquid moisture in the system this late in the season," he said.

In the lower James River Basin, flood fight efforts are also underway in the City of LaMoure in LaMoure County. Crews are plugging storm sewers and pre-positioning pumps. The United States Geological Survey installed a rapid deployment gage at Adrian to help local officials more accurately determine flows.

The Red River of the North Basin has also endured significant impacts. Cass County officials find themselves in an unprecedented fall flood fight. While rivers may not rise to spring levels, county officials notified the public that significant risk exists for flooding in rural areas, overtopping of roads, and loss of access to rural properties. Overland flooding from ditches, drains and other tributaries are undermining the county's rural roads that have been softened by wet conditions and are now more susceptible to washouts, placing drivers at risk.

Upstream in Traill County, officials describe the outlook as slim for a continuation of the harvest season. Washed out roads impeded access during continuous days of rain this fall. Heavy rain and snow in October compounded soaked conditions to the point where county and township roads have been closed after gravel and culvert washouts. Many roads remain inundated, further limiting access to fields.

In Walsh County, the Red River was projected to crest at 37 feet, 0.78 feet below the spring flood level, making it a top 10 flood for the area. Several roadways throughout the county are flooded. Through good planning and execution, Crystal Sugar workers relocated sugar beets before they became inundated.

Floodwaters are isolating homes and farmsteads in Grand Forks County, prompting public safety crews to prepare for potential rescues. The City of Grand Forks wastewater treatment plant is running at maximum capacity once again, and homeowners reported a second round of flooded basements. Officials have also had to relocate campers working the sugar beet harvest to a drier location.

City and county commissioners throughout the James River and Red River Basins have issued emergency and disaster declarations and additional counties are sure to follow suit. The ramifications of our growing season will be long lasting on producers and on consumers likely to experience higher food prices. The ripple effect will extend to area businesses dependent upon producers. The Agriculture Commissioner and I are particularly worried about the inordinate amount of stress our producers are experiencing. We are urging our typically stoic producers to reach out for behavioral health support if they are struggling with depression, sadness and hopelessness. We value each and every life, and do not want to lose producers to physical and mental health problems.

State Response

In response to spring flooding, I activated the State Recovery Multi-Agency Coordination Center, led by our state Agriculture Commissioner, the NDDDES Director, the NDDDES Homeland Security Director, and the State Engineer, who provided direction to help communities with recovery efforts. The state team conducted extensive outreach with residents and producers, establishing Multi-Agency Resource Centers (MARC) that were staffed by local, state and federal agencies and voluntary organizations whose representatives discussed available assistance, from mental health resources to cleanup help.

Agencies supporting the MARCs included the North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality, the North Dakota Department of Human Services, Lutheran Social Services of North Dakota, Latter-day Saints Charities, the Southern Baptist Convention Disaster Relief and the Upper Missouri Health District. The North Dakota Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) discussed available programs and listened to producers' concerns. Agriculture Commissioner Doug Goehring and I worked with the Bank of North Dakota to enact the AGPACE buydown loan programs for farmers who suffered extraordinary losses. The program helps offset the cost of structural repairs and replacement of livestock, equipment and farm/ranch facilities. Additionally, Commissioner Goehring and his staff personally contacted impacted producers.

Response to the wet summer and fall and the October snowstorm required, once more, a whole-of-government approach to helping citizens. Commissioner Goehring activated the Hay Hotline for producers needing more hay or transport of hay supplies. The Commissioner also urged producers to relocate livestock to areas protected from the storm. NDDDES staff conducted coordination calls to discuss preparedness measures with representatives of the Department of Transportation, Highway Patrol, National Guard, Department of Agriculture, Department of Human Services, Department of Health, Civil Air Patrol, State Radio, State Water Commission, National Weather Service, Rural Electric Cooperative Association and voluntary agencies, including the American Red Cross.

Commissioner Goehring and I issued a joint media release listing available behavioral health resources and urging farmers and ranchers to seek assistance for emotional distress. Commissioner Goehring also has been working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Risk Management Agency (RMA) and has expressed concerns about quality discounts on grain that don't reflect market discounts. NDDDES is working with our cities and counties to assess road damages and determine whether these damages meet federal thresholds for a federal disaster declaration.

Our farmers remain a priority for state leaders as we collaborate on potential solutions.

Conclusion

As the data from the Farm Service Agency and the experiences of our agricultural community underscore, our state farmers and ranchers are in need of immediate relief. A secretarial disaster designation would allow for needed implementation of FSA's Emergency Farm Loan Program and the Small Business Administration's (SBA) Economic Injury Loan Program for farm-related business. The Wildfires and Hurricanes Indemnity Program+ (WHIP+) is essential to help counties that have experienced flooding and snowstorms.

We appreciate your staunch support of our producers through the year and request an expedited review of this request. Please let us know if you have additional questions or would like to further discuss the farm crisis in North Dakota.

Sincerely,



Doug Burgum
Governor

Attachments: Attachment A: North Dakota Weather Summary for the Record Wet Period
Extending from the Middle of August into Early October 2019
Attachment B: 2019 ND Disaster Designation Requests Map – 10/31/2019
Attachment C: State Emergency Board Damage Assessment Report 2019

CC: North Dakota Agriculture Commissioner Doug Goehring
Senator John Hoeven
Senator Kevin Cramer
Representative Kelly Armstrong
MG Alan S. Dohrmann, Director, North Dakota Department of Emergency Services
Cody Schulz, Director, North Dakota Division of Homeland Security
Justin Messner, Disaster Recovery Chief, North Dakota Division of Homeland Security