



State of New Mexico

Michelle Lujan Grisham
Governor

July 28, 2022

Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

I have appreciated the discussions that we have had concerning the historic wildfires New Mexico experienced in late spring and early summer of this year. As I have relayed on a number of occasions, these fires have devastated communities that have been here for generations, and the lives of thousands of New Mexicans have been upended and forever changed. I also appreciate that your department, through the Forest Service, investigated both the Calf Canyon and Hermits Peak fires and took responsibility for igniting the prescribed burns that ultimately became these wildfires. However, significant work remains to ensure that the federal government and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) provide New Mexicans with the timely and comprehensive support they deserve to recover from these devastating wildfires.

The area impacted by the federally-caused fires includes over 341,000 acres, and was home to over 6,000 head of livestock and thousands of acres of managed forest land. The land ownership base in that area includes private, state and federal land. Impacted producers and landowners are now left with few alternatives to continue their livelihoods. These lands were their summer grazing pastures and in many cases also their winter grazing ranges, and while USDA has disaster programs available, these programs are taking far too long to access and will not cover 100 percent of producer and landowner losses. These producers and landowners cannot and should not be required to fill gaps in federal support with loan programs and pay interest on loans they did not require until the federally-caused fire.

I am writing to request that you make our producers whole by providing funds so that they can immediately buy the feed necessary to meet urgent needs, obtain replacement pasture, and begin urgent repairs to infrastructure like fencing that was damaged by the fires. Further, forest landowners need funds to repair fences and roads, stabilize soils, and replant burned forests. It is critical that USDA fulfill the commitments made to our communities, including our farmers and ranchers, to cover one hundred percent of the costs to make these producers and landowners whole. This may include providing resources for several years as the burn scars in impacted areas are rehabilitated.

Calf Canyon/Hermits Peak was the largest fire in our state's history but sadly not the only fire our communities endured this year. In total, more than 800,000 acres have burned so far this year, including 325,000 acres burned by the Black Fire, the second largest fire in New Mexico history. Producers and landowners in impacted areas across the state are facing similar impacts, including displaced livestock and damaged infrastructure. Repairs of this magnitude are costly, and producers and landowners statewide are counting on USDA programs to meet those needs and allow them to rebuild and maintain their livelihoods.

Time is of the essence, as we risk losing communities that have been a part of New Mexico since long before statehood. I thank you for your consideration and stand ready to work with you to ensure that the New Mexicans impacted by these devastating wildfires get the support they deserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michelle Lujan Grisham". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michelle Lujan Grisham
Governor