United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 7, 2009

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We are writing respectfully to urge you to take prompt action on the State of New Mexico's request for a natural disaster designation for seven counties in New Mexico. Since last October, the counties of Otero, Lincoln, De Baca, Roosevelt, Lea, Eddy, and Chaves have suffered from continuing severe drought conditions and high winds.

Producers in these Southeast New Mexico counties have suffered significant physical and production losses to agriculture due to high temperatures, high winds, and prolonged lack of precipitation. Hay, pasture, and forage crops have been most acutely affected. According to last week's Agricultural Statistical Service reports, 70 percent of range and pasture lands in the state are rated poor or very poor. The most recent U.S. Drought Monitor shows all of Southeastern New Mexico under moderate or severe drought conditions. In addition, 100 percent of the state's dry winter wheat crop and 80% of dry sorghum are rated poor or very poor. Through the first six months of this year, the City of Roswell in Chaves County has received only 0.72 inches of rain, 85% below normal. Also, as a result of the drought, extreme fire danger exists across most of the state. Recent rains have been isolated and insufficient to relieve the ongoing dry conditions that are forecasted to continue and may worsen.

In light of the ongoing losses and the possible long-term impacts of the drought in New Mexico, we urge you to take prompt action on Governor Richardson's request that seven counties in New Mexico be declared primary disaster areas and approved for a Secretarial designation.

Thank you for your prompt consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Jeff Bingaman
United States Senator

Tom Udall
United States Senator