



# STATE OF MINNESOTA

## Office of Governor Mark Dayton

130 State Capitol ♦ 75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard ♦ Saint Paul, MN 55155

June 14, 2012

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary  
United States Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, DC 20251

Dear Mr. Secretary,

I am writing to urge you to take swift action to assist Minnesota livestock producers who are experiencing serious difficulty in sourcing feedstuffs due to the widespread winter kill of our alfalfa crop and the persistent wet conditions that have prevented many Minnesota farmers from planting a crop in a timely fashion.

This situation compounds a serious shortage of forage due to severe drought conditions in Minnesota last year. These events have contributed to record high forage prices and a lack of availability.

Minnesota's livestock industry is critically important to our economy. In 2010 Minnesota ranked fifth in the nation in overall agricultural production with sales of \$15.14 billion and sixth in animal agriculture with receipts of \$6.18 billion. Needless to say, our livestock industry is the foundation for thousands of Minnesota jobs.

I have heard from livestock producers across Minnesota who are very concerned about how they will source feedstuffs and the future of their industry if swift action is not taken. To that end, I have asked my administration to consider options to open state conservation lands to emergency haying and grazing. For all conservation lands – state and federal- we should identify opportunities to address this urgent forage need while ensuring we maintain the intended long-term conservation benefits. I also ask you to consider the following actions that USDA could take to provide immediate assistance to livestock producers in Minnesota:

1. **Waive the November 1<sup>st</sup> deadline that prohibits haying or grazing of cover crops on prevented plant acres.** The waiver would remove the penalty currently facing livestock producers within the crop insurance program. The waiver, along with the actions suggested below, would allow temporary relief to Minnesota's livestock producers facing a forage shortage.

2. **Emergency Haying and Grazing of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) Lands:** USDA allowed emergency haying and grazing of Minnesota CRP lands in 2012 to confront the drought conditions in many parts of the country. I request that you again issue emergency orders to allow Minnesota producers to hay and graze CRP and WRP lands.
3. **Additional Funding for Cover Crops in Minnesota:** Due to the persistent wet conditions, many Minnesota farmers have been forced to take prevented plant on their crop insurance. This has resulted in many acres of unplanted crop land. I request that you provide cost share funding for Minnesota farmers to establish cover crops to grow additional forage for feed and protect the health of our soil.
4. **Waive Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) Rules to Allow Emergency Harvest of Minnesota Cover Crops:** The current EQIP contract rules do not allow the harvesting of cover crops. I request that you waive the EQIP rules on an emergency basis to allow Minnesota farmers to harvest these cover crops to help alleviate the shortage of feedstuffs in Minnesota.

I appreciate your consideration of this request and your dedication to maintaining the competitiveness of America's agricultural producers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Dayton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and "D".

Mark Dayton  
Governor