

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

January 17, 2007

The Honorable Mike Johanns
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We write today in support of the request made by Colorado Governor Bill Ritter to make a Secretarial disaster declaration for ten Colorado counties. As you are likely aware, these counties have been severely affected by several blizzards over the last four weeks and are experiencing a devastating loss of livestock. Unfortunately the, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has denied Colorado's request for help for ranchers and livestock, because helping livestock is outside their mandate of assisting people affected by natural disasters. However, we are confident that assisting ranchers and livestock is within the charter of the Department of Agriculture.

Agriculture is a major component of life in the West and a key part of the economy in Colorado. The part of Colorado we are requesting aid for is home to almost 500,000 head of livestock whose worth is valued at more than half a billion dollars. The blizzards of late December have had a major negative impact on the livelihood of hundreds of farmers and ranchers. The full effects of these storms will reverberate with residents in Colorado long after the visible signs of damage have passed.

For this reason we ask that you approve Colorado's request for a disaster declaration and provide the people of Colorado with the assistance they have requested. We ask that you and your staff also assist the State of Colorado in identifying programs and funding, such as emergency feed programs, livestock carcass disposal programs, low or no-interest loan programs, as well as any other programs within the USDA that can be used to aid the farmers and ranchers in getting back on their feet following these blizzards. While current confirmed losses are below ten thousand head, experts in Colorado are certain that this number will continue to rise as conditions begin to allow greater access to the hardest hit areas.

We stand ready to help you and your agency in any way possible. Please feel free to contact our staff at any time.

Sincerely,


Wayne Allard


Ken Salazar

Marilyn Musgrave

Jana DeLette

Ed Perkhala

Jim Salazar

Long Samson

Murdell