

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 18, 2022

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

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

In early 2021, Louisiana experienced what can be described as a historic deep freeze. Parts of Louisiana witnessed temperatures dropping to near zero, breaking records that date back to 1903. The freeze caused significant damage to infrastructure such as pipes and agriculture operations. The historic winter storm left millions of Americans huddled for warmth in their dark, cold homes with more than 200,000 residents without electricity at the event's peak. All told, 63 of Louisiana's 64 parishes issued emergency declarations in response to this event, and tragically, the state reported six fatalities stemming from the treacherous weather. As a result, President Biden issued an emergency declaration for the State of Louisiana due to the winter weather event that began on February 11, 2021.

One of the many industries that was hit hard by the freeze was our crawfish industry. Crawfish require warm temperatures in order to flourish and grow. In fact, even a day or two of severe cold weather can significantly stunt their growth. As we saw, this historic winter freeze did not kill the crawfish, but instead substantially slowed down their growth, crippling supply at the beginning of the season. Later that year, while crawfish farmers were still recovering from losses, Hurricane Ida ripped through Louisiana causing tens of billions in property damage.

As you know, the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honey Bees and Farm-raised Fish Program (ELAP) provides financial assistance to eligible producers of livestock, honeybees and farm-raised fish for losses due to disease, certain adverse weather events or other loss conditions. In May 2021, we were relieved food fish and other aquatic species were granted eligibility to request ELAP assistance. While we're encouraged to learn that the Farm Service Agency (FSA) began delivering this much needed assistance to our crawfish farmers just two weeks ago, we've since received several concerns from farmers whose applications have been denied due to the failure to report their acreage prior to the September deadline.

We understand that acreage reporting is a normal practice for FSA programs, and traditional crop farmers are aware of the process, requirements, and deadlines. However, it is essential to note that crawfish farming is a unique, niche practice to which some producers' first time engaging with FSA was for this purpose. Additionally, given the deadline fell in the middle of the enrollment period and some local offices' operational status still not at full capacity, we request that you provide first time applicants with flexibility in meeting these reporting requirements.

We urge you and the FSA Administrator to review this time-sensitive request and grant much needed assistance to our Louisiana crawfish farmers. We believe it is necessary for USDA to release emergency funding for Americans that have been through multiple extreme weather events.

Thank you for your consideration and for your dedicated service to America's farmers and ranchers.

Sincerely,



John Kennedy
United States Senator



Bill Cassidy, M.D.
United States Senator



Clay Higgins
United States Congressman



Mike Johnson
United States Congressman



Julia Letlow
United States Congresswoman



Steve Scalise
United States Congressman