May 15, 2020

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House Agriculture Committee
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The undersigned agricultural groups represent cattle producers across the country who have been negatively impacted by the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Thank you for your work to provide necessary resources to America’s farmers and ranchers whose day-to-day operations have been affected by COVID-19. In addition to the flexibilities provided, we ask that Congress work to ensure that agricultural producers do not face a forage shortage in the coming weeks and months. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has indicated they require additional authority to provide flexibilities in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) outside of the existing definition of “natural disaster”. We urge Congress to grant USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) the ability to open Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acreage for emergency haying and grazing, in addition to removing the Risk Management Agency’s November 1st deadline for harvesting and grazing prevented plant acreage cover crops – directly in response to COVID-19 impacts. The Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions (HEROES) Act would allow haying and grazing of 5 million Soil Health and Income Protection Program (SHIPP) acres until the end of the calendar year. While work remains to be done on the HEROES Act, this provision recognizes the need for flexibility regarding these acres, providing a strong foundation for ongoing legislative efforts.

As a result of processing disruptions, farmers and ranchers are faced with uncertainty about their ability to keep and feed livestock for longer periods of time, understanding they will likely face shortages in both forage and acreage. Allowing cattle to graze achieves an effective maintenance diet, but livestock producers will also look to feed rations with a higher forage content in the absence of adequate grazing acreage. COVID-19 has created a supply chain emergency for the entire livestock industry, and Congress must respond.

While the undersigned groups appreciate previous action taken by USDA to provide flexibility in conservation and disaster-related programs, these allowances do not provide the resources to sustain
forage demand for millions of animals across the country. While COVID-19 is not a weather-related event, it is a naturally occurring phenomenon causing widespread losses across the agricultural industry. We respectfully ask that Congress provide necessary flexibility for livestock producers impacted by COVID-19 to hay and graze their CRP acreage with no reduction in annual rental rate. Additionally, immediate passage of the Cover Crop Flexibility Act of 2020 will permanently address the domino effect created by producers’ inability to plant crops in the spring and summer. By allowing producers to graze and harvest prevented plant cover crop acreage, Congress can close the forage gap during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

Thank you for your continued commitment to America’s farmers and ranchers. We look forward to working with you to ensure that livestock producers have the resources they need to weather this storm.

Sincerely,

National Cattlemen’s Beef Association
Alabama Cattlemen’s Association
Arizona Cattle Feeders’ Association
California Cattlemen’s Association
Colorado Cattlemen’s Association
Colorado Livestock Association
Idaho Cattlemen’s Association
Indiana Beef Cattle Association
Illinois Beef Association
Iowa Cattlemen’s Association
Florida Cattlemen’s Association
Georgia Cattlemen’s Association
Kansas Livestock Association
Kentucky Cattlemen’s Association
Louisiana Cattlemen’s Association
Maryland Cattlemen’s Association
Michigan Cattlemen’s Association
Minnesota State Cattlemen’s Association
Mississippi Cattlemen’s Association
Missouri Cattlemen’s Association
Nebraska Cattlemen
New Mexico Cattle Growers’ Association
North Carolina Cattlemen’s Association
North Dakota Stockmen’s Association
Ohio Cattlemen’s Association
Oklahoma Cattlemen’s Association
Oregon Cattlemen’s Association
Pennsylvania Cattlemen’s Association
South Dakota Cattlemen’s Association
Texas Cattle Feeders Association
Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association
Utah Cattlemen’s Association
Virginia Cattlemen’s Association
Washington Cattlemen’s Association
Wisconsin Cattlemen’s Association
Wyoming Stock Growers Association