

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

March 5, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

In December of last year, you visited Hawaii Island and received a first-hand account of the challenges that recent natural disasters have brought to our agricultural community. It is our understanding that you received an up-close view of the immense destruction caused by the lava flow. Following your visit to Hawaii we spoke with individuals who interacted with you. These producers have indicated that during your visit you voiced interest in helping our agricultural community recover from these disasters.

We are writing on behalf of these farmers and producers in Hawaii who have spent the past year recovering from multiple natural disasters including record-breaking rain events, associated flooding, and a volcanic eruption. Prior to your visit, we sent two separate letters to Undersecretary Bill Northey requesting critical disaster assistance and programmatic flexibility. Our requests included utilizing CCC authority, Section 32 authority, allocating a portion of tariff assistance for ad-hoc disaster assistance, and creative flexibility with the Emergency Conservation Program. While these requests are well within USDA's existing authorities, unfortunately the response that we have received indicates that while USDA is aware of the impacts that natural disasters have had in Hawaii, the agency is reluctant to work with us and our local producers to provide assistance outside of existing disaster assistance programs. Our producers in Hawaii have experienced truly unique circumstances that require creativity and flexibility to appropriately address. The narrow focus within which USDA has chosen to operate in providing relief for our producers is disappointing.

Given your firsthand experience meeting the people and seeing the areas of our state that experienced over 50 inches of rain in a single weather event and the lava flow on Hawaii Island, we hope you can understand that existing disaster assistance programs cannot provide the relief needed for a farmer who has had their home, crop, land, and/or infrastructure become flooded, washed away, or buried under lava.

As such, we request that your agency work with us to use the USDA's existing authorities—beyond its standard disaster programs—to help our producers recover and quickly resume agricultural production.

Our farmers and producers in Hawaii work day in and day out to make meaningful contributions to our agricultural industry. In spite of the immense obstacles they have faced, many want to get back to production as soon as possible. We admire their resiliency and work ethic and will continue working to provide them the assistance they deserve. Given your personal experience meeting these people and seeing their communities, we hope you will agree.

We look forward to working with you to find ways to better support Hawaii's farmers and producers.

Sincerely,



MAZIE K. HIRONO
U.S. Senator



BRIAN SCHATZ
U.S. Senator



TULSI GABBARD
U.S. Representative



ED CASE
U.S. Representative