

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1604

February 24, 2003

The Honorable Ann Veneman, Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Veneman,

I am writing to you regarding the implementation of disaster assistance that was approved by the Congress and signed by the President. As you know, \$3.1 billion has been approved in disaster assistance for crop and livestock losses in 2001 and 2002. However, it has come to my attention that Under Secretary Penn has stated that the application process for disaster payments is likely to be delayed until late spring or summer.

These comments are very discouraging. As a member of the Appropriations Committee, I made it a top priority to get disaster assistance passed in the Fiscal Year 2003 Omnibus Appropriations Bill. Kansas farmers are suffering terribly, as are farmers and producers across the United States.

It is imperative that this aid get to the farmers as quickly as possible. Delaying this process until late spring or summer will continue to be detrimental to the livelihood of America's farming communities.

While the implementation of disaster aid is another challenge to the Farm Service Agency's busy county office staffs, Congress provided an additional \$70 million for FSA in the FY 2003 Omnibus spending bill to help the Agency meet its obligations.

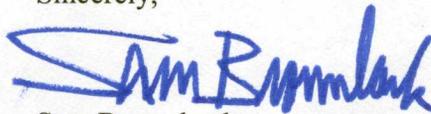
The mission of the FSA is to help U.S. agriculture producers maintain viable operations - to provide equitable customer service to all producers. This means efficiently implementing all agricultural programs, including emergency and disaster assistance.

Many producers in Kansas and elsewhere have been left in dire financial conditions from a drought of historic proportions. They are counting on this assistance to help pay for seed, fertilizer, crop insurance and other expenses for the upcoming growing season. We need to ensure that this assistance gets to those who need it most as soon as possible.

I am pleased that USDA will establish a disaster assistance working group. But producers need real assurances that payments are on the way, and soon. I urge you to continue to provide innovative leadership and quickly develop a plan to expedite the processing and payment of this disaster assistance. For drought-stricken farmers and ranchers, there is no greater priority.

Thank you. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Sam Brownback
United States Senator