

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4304

Committee on Armed Services

Military Personnel

Cyber, Innovative Technologies and
Information Systems

Committee on Oversight and Reform

Environment

March 11, 2021

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

I am writing to express my concern with the recent changes to Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) facility COVID policy, and the approaching deadline for election and enrollment for 2021 Agricultural Risk Coverage and Price Coverage Programs. It is vital that we support our farmers, who remain a source of stability during the challenges of this global pandemic, and urge you to extend the date of election or enrollment past March 15, 2021.

March 15, 2021 is the deadline for election and enrollment for the Agricultural Risk Coverage and Price Coverage Programs, which are commodity programs aimed at financially supporting our nation's farmers. Due to the recently implemented USDA COVID Workplace Safety Plan, all FPAC facilities must maintain staffing at 25% capacity, and visitors have been prohibited. This reversal of protocol revokes the ability for farmers to visit their Farm Service Agency (FSA) office to make an election, or to enroll in a program. While the farmers are still able to call offices, or utilize online tools to aid in their decision, many farms have limited to no internet access, making these virtual tools inaccessible.

Other factors, such as Winter Storm Uri, and the recent passage of H.R. 1319 The American Rescue Plan Act, have created an even greater reliance on FSA assistance. As of March 8, 2021, only 81 percent of the expected participation have enrolled, leaving almost 20 percent of farms still needing to enroll or elect for this year. I understand the importance of the safety and wellbeing of our FSA employees and our farmers, however, it is crucial that we safely reopen FSA offices, so our farmers can receive the assistance they deserve. We cannot expect all farmers to be able to make this choice virtually, especially when a virtual option is not accessible for farms without internet.

I urge you to reopen FSA offices and to create guidelines for the reopening of these offices that mirror the COVID regulations of the region in which they reside. I also encourage you to consider extending the date of election or enrollment past March 15, 2021 to compensate for the inaccessibility of virtual tools, and limited capacity of FSA offices. I appreciate your time and consideration.

For Texas and Liberty,



Pat Fallon (TX-4)
Member of Congress