

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 16, 2010

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We would like to commend the recent decision of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to allocate \$54,294 to address United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) goals of enhancing early plant pest detection and surveillance, threat identification and mitigation. Your continued partnership with state and local weed and pest coordinators to manage destructive pests is not only appreciated, but critical to ensuring the success of these efforts. However, we are concerned that the recent grant announcement, while welcome, does not come with the flexibility necessary to address Wyoming's most pressing needs.

We have been advised that the Farm Bill section 10201 grant given to Wyoming is intended to combat the European Grapevine Moth. While Wyoming's Department of Agriculture, Weed and Pest Coordinator, and private landowners prepare their defense against the pending onslaught of grasshoppers even as we write, APHIS proposes to spend \$54,294 dollars on a pest that does not even exist in Wyoming. We recognize the importance of taking early steps to combat destructive pests like the European Grapevine Moth where it has been discovered; however, we believe it a much better use of tax-pay dollars to cooperatively fight a destructive pest already known to exist in disastrously large quantities.

According to USDA surveys, many areas in the west experienced much higher grasshopper populations in the summer of 2009 than were anticipated. In fact, the grasshopper population in some areas was quadruple the level normally considered by pest coordinators to be a strong indicator for the use of chemical control methods. Many livestock producers in our state suffered significant economic loss as a result of last summer's grasshopper infestation. To make matters worse, producers that experienced infestation-related loss were largely ineligible for disaster assistance.

While 2009 was a difficult year, forecasts for the summer of 2010 show that the infestation could be worse and more widespread. Forecast maps indicate that 160 million acres of western lands will be impacted by grasshoppers. The resulting damage to crops and livestock forage could be catastrophic. The severity of the issue mirrors that of 1985 when APHIS treated over 20 million acres of land for grasshoppers. Despite these dire predictions, it does not appear as though the USDA has any sense of urgency in the face of this pending plague. For example, APHIS has currently budgeted enough funds for only 70,000 acres of treatment – a woefully inadequate number.

As you know, nearly half of Wyoming's range-land is federally owned. This fact makes a state/federal partnership imperative in successfully addressing grasshopper infestation. To that end, we respectfully request that APHIS work with Wyoming's Department of Agriculture and Weed and Pest Coordinator in creating a flexible, proactive plan to confront the coming infestation. Specifically, we urge you to allow Wyoming's Department of Agriculture and Weed and Pest Coordinator flexibility to use the recently announced grant monies for grasshopper treatment. We also urge APHIS to reduce the 16% administrative charge to non-federal partners participating in APHIS run programs.

APHIS' own Implementation Plan for Section 10201 grants states, "APHIS will continue to keep the States' needs in mind as we implement Section 10201 and allocate funds." With the notable exception of Bark Beetle, Wyoming has no greater need than grasshopper mitigation. We believe that any steps to proactively address this situation will not only help alleviate producer loss, but also the need for ad hoc disaster payments this summer and fall.

We appreciate your assistance and look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



U.S. Senator Michael B. Enzi



U.S. Senator John Barrasso, M.D.



U.S. Representative Cynthia M. Lummis