

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

November 20, 2024

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave. S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

I am writing to you today to raise concerns regarding the denial of Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) coverage to gamebird farmers who have suffered serious losses as a result of severe weather events.

As written, the Livestock Indemnity Program is intended to provide relief to farmers who experienced adverse events resulting in beyond normal mortality levels. Unfortunately, we are hearing from constituents who have been denied LIP assistance, or told by USDA not to apply for it, because the agency would not be in the position to provide it. In these cases, the constituents were gamebird farmers who experienced beyond normal mortality levels as a result of tornadoes and hurricanes that hit the nation this year.

Hurricane Helene devastated agricultural operations across our southeastern coast this September. To assess the impact of the storm, the North American Gamebird Association reached out to farmers to ensure they had awareness of, and access to, available resources, including assistance from USDA. During their outreach, they found that farmers in Georgia were discouraged from applying to LIP by agency officials because they produced gamebirds. Unfortunately, we know they were not alone in their denial of assistance.

This June, MacFarlane Pheasants, Inc., the largest pheasant producer in the country, lost over 50,000 birds due to an EF2 tornado. In addition to the loss of poultry, the tornado caused substantial damage to MacFarlane Pheasants, Inc., including the destruction of pens, fencing, and other farm infrastructure necessary to support the flock. The financial impact on the farm's operations has been devastating, resulting in over \$2 million in damages. As a result of the destruction, the farmer-owner sought LIP assistance from USDA, but was ultimately denied coverage because it is a gamebird operation.

Placing a prohibition on LIP assistance to gamebird farmers is inconsistent with the underlying statutory language and intent of the program, especially at a time when severe weather events are impacting farmers across the country and creating a significant hardship for their businesses and families. I urge the agency to reconsider its decision to deny assistance to gamebird farmers under LIP and thereby ensure these farmers across the nation have the resources they need to recover from severe weather disasters.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to your response and reconsideration of coverage for gamebird farmers under LIP.

Sincerely,



Tammy Baldwin
U.S. Senator



Bryan Steil
Member of Congress



Roger Marshall, M.D.
U.S. Senator



Tina Smith
U.S. Senator