

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6000
202-224-2035

March 8, 2022

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

Dear Mr. Secretary,

President Putin's premeditated and unprovoked invasion into Ukraine has significantly disrupted U.S. agricultural markets. Cash prices for wheat have increased by more than \$2.60 per bushel, corn prices have increased by more than \$0.90 per bushel, and soybean prices have increased by nearly \$0.60 per bushel. The significant increase in prices is related to supply concerns resulting from the ongoing closure of ports that are key to the export of agricultural commodities from Ukraine, and the likely disruption in spring planting of crops such as wheat, corn, sunflower, and barley due to the conflict.^{1,2}

These disruptions in the supply of wheat, feed grains, and oilseeds will affect food security and further exacerbate ballooning global inflation. With inflation at a 40-year high, and global food prices reaching a new record last month, the Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) should focus on policy options to increase domestic production of food.³ To that end, I request to delay the sign-up deadline for Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) until U.S. farmers have a better understanding of potential supply disruptions associated with Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Additionally, with regard to any acres electing not to re-enroll in CRP, or any acres that would have otherwise been enrolled in CRP, the Administration should ensure maximum flexibility for farmers to purchase insurance for these spring-planted crops.

A delay of the CRP sign-up deadline and an increase in the flexibility for a farmer to purchase crop insurance will allow U.S. farmers to evaluate whether it is better to raise and insure a crop or enroll in CRP. Further, should conditions in Ukraine continue to deteriorate, consideration should be given to continued opportunities to graze livestock on CRP ground without penalty, and a one-time waiver to plant a spring crop on non-environmentally sensitive CRP cropland in order to offset anticipated production losses in Ukraine.

¹ See <https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/concerns-rise-over-black-sea-spring-crops-amid-russia-ukraine-war-2022-03-01/>

² USDA data reveals that during the most recent crop year, Ukraine harvested corn and wheat on more than 30 million acres and produced a record amount of both crops. Ukraine exported 80% of their corn production and 73% of their wheat production, representing 16% and 12% of global corn and wheat trade, respectively. Including Russia, 29% of the global wheat trade originates from Ukraine and Russia.

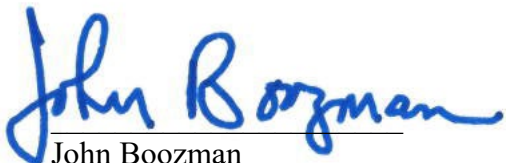
³ See <https://www.reuters.com/world/food-prices-hit-record-high-february-un-agency-says-2022-03-04/>

Currently, there are 22 million acres enrolled in CRP, and for the 2022 fiscal year a statutory cap of 25.5 million acres is in place. As a result, there is the potential to provide farmers with access to millions of acres of cropland and pasture that would have otherwise remained idle in order to address both inflation and food security concerns. This should be a top priority. Notably, the European Union is considering a similar approach of allowing farmers to use fallow land to grow crops, counter supply disruptions, enhance food security, and reduce inflationary pressures following the invasion of Ukraine.⁴

As I am sure you understand, U.S. farmers are the most efficient in sustainably raising crops and caring for livestock, and they do so in order to feed, clothe and fuel the world. With economic pressures being felt by all of us, and unprecedented aggression causing shock waves across the globe, now is the time for the U.S. to rise to the occasion and ensure food security at home and around the world by facilitating the full utility of productive cropland and pasture across the U.S.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this urgent request.

Sincerely,



John Boozman

Ranking Member

U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

⁴ See <https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-agriculture-in-vivo/update-1-eu-may-let-farmers-use-fallow-land-as-ukraine-war-hits-grain-supply-idUSL1N2V52T1>