

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 7, 2011

Administrator William J. Murphy
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Risk Management Agency
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Administrator Murphy,

For years, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has been encouraging farmers to adopt practices that help them uphold their stewardship of the land. However, we are concerned that farmers who have adopted the best conservation practices will be penalized for doing so.

As you know, this spring the Midwest has seen unusually persistent wet weather that has delayed the removal of cover crops and subsequent planting. Under current RMA guidelines, farmers are not eligible for crop insurance coverage for their regular cash crop unless the cover crop has been removed by a set date. The result is that, through no fault of their own, farmers who adopted the best conservation practices may not be eligible for crop insurance. Given this, we respectfully ask that you provide farmers who are embracing good conservation practices – and have been unable to remove cover crops due to the wet weather – with more flexibility to remove their cover crop and plant their regular cash crop.

We appreciate your recognition of the Midwest's record-setting rainfall this year by moving the required cover crop kill date from May 15 to June 1 for corn and June 10 for soybean planting. At this time last year, the vast majority of farmers had already planted their crops in our home states. Unfortunately, this year has been particularly difficult for many farmers in the Midwest. Farmers may be permanently discouraged from using cover crops in the future, should they have problems obtaining crop insurance this year.

Traditionally, farmers who choose to integrate cover crops in farming systems have been known to increase their profitability and also improve local water quality. Cover crops are providing benefits for farmers by reducing soil compaction, storing nutrients, and soaking up excess water. Failing to provide crop insurance to these farmers penalizes them for following good conservation practices and the advice of National Resources Conservation Services (NRCS). Cover crops are not preventing farmers from planting – wet weather is. Some of the only fields that have been planted in our home states are those where corn or soybeans are planted into a standing cover crop.

Even in less-than-ideal weather, cover crops help farmers that elect to plant them. Research shows that cover crops can increase the yield of cash crops by improving soil quality and nutrients. Additionally, in wet years, cover crops are one of the quickest ways to bring soil moisture to appropriate levels for planting. Cover crops reduce nutrient and pesticide runoff by 50 percent or more, decrease soil erosion by 90 percent, and increase the rate of water infiltration into soils to circumvent flooding. These cost-saving conservation efforts benefit our waters from

Grand Lake St. Marys to the Great Lakes and the Gulf of Mexico, generating economic benefits from tourism, fishing, and recreation.

By creating such uncertainty with regard to insuring cover crops, it could threaten to remove this important tool from our conservation toolkit into the future. We appreciate your consideration of this request and thank you for your continued flexibility with our nation's farmers.

Sincerely,



Sherrod Brown
US Senator



Richard G. Lugar
US Senator

CC: Chief Dave White, US Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service