

United States Senate

February 1, 2017

COMMITTEES
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION AND
FORESTRY
APPROPRIATIONS
ENERGY AND NATURAL
RESOURCES
HOMELAND SECURITY AND
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
INDIAN AFFAIRS

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture - Designee
Presidential Transition
1800 E Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006

Dear Governor Perdue:

Congratulations on being nominated as the next Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). As a member of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, I look forward to you coming before the Committee and working with you as we develop the next farm bill, roll back the federal footprint on agriculture, and expand opportunities for Montana's number one industry. Agriculture is not just an economic driver in the state, it is a way of life for thousands of Montanans.

I also wanted to highlight a few issues within USDA's jurisdiction that are of critical importance to Montana. While not an exhaustive list by any means, below are a few of my priorities:

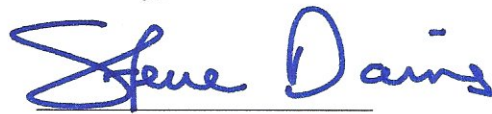
- **Forest management reform** - Over the past generation, harvests on federal forests in Montana are down over 70% and we have seen a 40% reduction in the wood products workforce. Excessive regulations and chronic litigation from fringe groups are largely responsible for this decline. Meanwhile, over 7 million of federally controlled acres in Montana are at high risk of wildfire. I look forward to working with you and the Forest Service to restore active management and address the litigation challenge.
- **Level the playing field for Montana farmers and ranchers** - Ensuring that Montana producers are treated fairly in foreign markets is critical to Montana jobs and our economy. For example, Montana ranchers must be able to sell beef into the Chinese market, Canada discriminates against U.S. wheat within its grading system, and Japan imposes unfair foreign taxes on Montana barley. I urge you to prioritize these issues, enforce existing trade agreements, and work to reduce foreign tax and regulatory barriers facing Montana producers as they compete for the 95% of the world's consumers that live outside of the United States.
- **Rural Utilities Service** - Access to technology removes geography as a constraint and allows Montanans to start and grow world-class companies. Closing the gap in connectivity between rural and urban areas and expanding broadband service in rural regions is critical, and a robust Rural Utilities Service can play an important role in that process.
- **Biotechnology** - Last year, Congress prevented a Vermont food labeling law from being implemented nation-wide. This discriminatory regulation would have hamstrung Montana agriculture, put hundreds of jobs at risk, and increased prices for Montana families. Ensuring that any rules or regulations that USDA promulgates are based on sound science is essential.

- **Crop Insurance** – Crop insurance is a vital program for Montana farmers and ranchers. It is imperative that a strong crop insurance program is protected from unwarranted cuts.

I also would like to extend a formal invitation for you to join me as a keynote speaker at the Montana Ag Summit later this year. The Summit will take place from May 31-June 1, 2017 in Great Falls, Montana and will focus on strengthening international relationships for Montana agriculture, showcase technology advancements, promote the next generation of farmers and ranchers, and discuss the challenges of federal policies and regulations.

Congratulations again on your nomination, and I look forward to continuing to dialogue with you and your department on issues related to Montana agriculture.

Sincerely,



STEVE DAINES

United States Senator