

United States Senate

May 18, 2020

Dear Rural Leaders and Agriculture Stakeholders:

As members of the Senate Democrats' Special Committee on the Climate Crisis and senators representing states across the country that will each be impacted by climate change in different ways, we are writing to ask for your input. We would like to hear how extreme weather and climate change have already affected you and your community and collect ideas on how we can best address these challenges at the federal level. We know that climate change poses unique challenges for rural areas and that you and your community have unique opportunities to be part of the solution to this crisis. We are interested in knowing what tools would be most useful for you as you continue to confront a changing climate and look for opportunities for solutions that work for you and your community.

The work of America's farm families and their rural economies is crucial for the function and prosperity of our nation and world. From droughts and wildfires to excessive rain and delayed planting, we have already seen extreme weather impact ranchers' and farmers' bottom lines and know it will continue to do so. Because those involved in the agricultural economy are caretakers of working lands, anchors of our rural communities and the source of food and fiber for our nation and world, we want to hear directly from you about the threats from climate change and extreme weather that you are facing today. We also want to know what tools would be useful in your communities, on farms and rangelands, and for businesses to be resilient in the face of future challenges.

The vitality and stability of rural communities and businesses is critical to the economic health and stability of our nation, and we are asking for your perspective and expertise on the challenges and opportunities that you see in the agricultural sector, and in rural areas. The Committee would particularly value your input on the following questions:

1. What challenges do you face from weather extremes? What would it take for your community to be prepared for more severe storms, droughts, wildfires and flooding? What additional tools would be valuable as you work to plan for future weather extremes and to ensure your community is prepared to make it through disaster events?
2. What are the most important reasons for acting to improve resiliency and slow the impacts of changes to climate? How would you describe the risks and local impacts of inaction?
3. Are there existing tools for farmers, ranchers and communities such as those at the U.S. Department of Agriculture in their Natural Resources Conservation Service or Farm Service Agency that would help your area be more resilient? Are there ways those tools could be expanded or changed to address the challenges land managers face in keeping our working lands and agricultural operations productive and profitable in the face of changes in local and large-scale weather patterns and growing conditions?

4. The work that farmers, ranchers, and woodland owners do is crucial to protecting our water quality and keeping our environment healthy. Many of these existing practices, as well as new and expanded ones, can also provide a range of useful benefits to improve resiliency, including reducing flooding, stabilizing infrastructure, and sequestering carbon. Some of the most impactful steps to reducing climate change and reducing the impacts from weather extremes are things that farmers, ranchers and woodland owners are uniquely expert at. Your contributions could make a significant impact in the success of our country at averting the worst challenges. These contributions provide an opportunity for land managers to be compensated for their management practices.

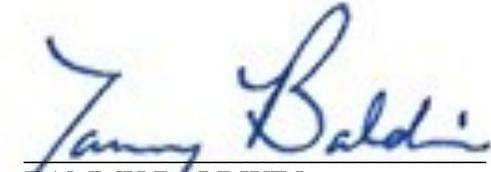
Given that, we would like to hear your perspectives on these opportunities:

- a. What are the most promising opportunities for land managers to benefit from climate action that are based on tools, such as conservation practices, that are currently in use?
 - b. What new tools and strategies have the most potential for improving resiliency and sequestering carbon?
 - c. What are the key barriers to adoption of these practices? Are there solutions you would recommend prioritizing?
 - d. What challenges do you see in the balance of food and fiber production with the incorporation of additional resiliency and carbon sequestration activities? Are there tools or strategies that could help reduce the difficulty of these challenges?
 - e. What types of recognition, certification, compensation, or other acknowledgement would be most useful to promote the use of conservation practices that are particularly effective at reducing climate change?
5. What technical assistance is most important for agricultural producers in your region? Who is best suited to deliver technical assistance? What additional tools or resources would make it possible to best tailor and deploy these strategies in your area?
 6. What technical assistance is most important for rural communities in your region?
 7. A wide range of solutions have been proposed to slow climate change, and there are additional strategies that could be developed. What approaches to policy and action to reduce the severity of climate change and the impacts of severe weather would you be most interested in seeing put in place? What do you see as the best way to accomplish action as quickly as possible?

As those most familiar with our working lands and the communities around them, your knowledge and input on these issues is of enormous value to us. These questions are intended as a starting point for discussion—please include other thoughts relevant to these concerns. We look forward to hearing from you.

We request you respond in writing to rural_climateinput@schatz.senate.gov before June 19, 2020. Please note in your response if you do not want your comments posted publicly or quoted in a public summary report.

Sincerely,


TAMMY BALDWIN
United States Senator


BRIAN SCHATZ
United States Senator


SHELDON WHITEHOUSE
United States Senator

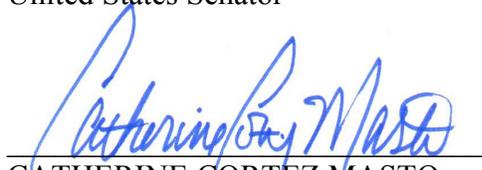

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