



Agricultural Commissioner
Henry S. Gonzales

Chief Deputy Agricultural
Commissioner
Korinne M. Bell

January 5, 2017

Brenda Estrada, County Executive Director
United States Department of Agriculture
Farm Services Agency
920 E. Stowell Road
Santa Maria, CA 93454

Dear Ms. Estrada:

This letter serves to document our findings with regard to drought losses suffered by livestock producers in Ventura County from October of 2016 through current day. Although Ventura County did receive more rain this season, due to the impacts of a prolonged drought, grazing losses were still at 85% of normal.

Compounding years of drought have taken their toll on rangeland and livestock producers in Ventura County. Historically, Ventura County rangeland could support a cattle stocking rate of 1 animal unit per 20 acres. The effects of the ongoing drought have increased the stocking rates to as high as 1 animal unit per 80 acres, this year. Most producers have liquidated their herds due to the high costs associated with feeding baled hay and supplements. Rotational grazing of pastures, a sustainable practice implemented to encourage forage growth and nutrition, has become nearly impossible due to the lack of available feed. Due to the high cost of land values in Ventura County, many livestock producers have gone out of business entirely, as a result of the prolonged drought. The resulting effect of rangeland left fallow will be an increase in invasive weed pests which crowd out native grasses and forbs and increase the risks for wildland fires. This was painfully evident from our most recent fire event, the Thomas Fire. Preliminary damage results show that approximately 60,000 acres of rangeland were impacted by the Thomas Fire, leaving livestock producers in those areas with nothing to carry their cattle into the spring months. For those livestock producers, the remaining 15% of feed that was available to them due to the drought, is now down to zero.

In light of these conditions, we request your assistance for livestock producers in Ventura County. If you have any questions regarding this issue, please feel free to contact Chief Deputy Agricultural Commissioner Korinne Bell at (805) 933-2415.

Sincerely,

Henry S. Gonzales
Agricultural Commissioner



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Chief Deputy Agricultural Commissioner
Korinne M. Bell

C: Mike Powers, CEO Ventura County
Steve Bennett, Supervisor District 1
Linda Parks, Supervisor District 2
Kelly Long, Supervisor District 3
Peter C. Foy, Supervisor District 4
John C. Zaragoza, Supervisor District 5
Kevin McGowan, Ventura County Sheriff's Office of Emergency Services
Beverly Bigger, President of Ventura County Cattlemen's Association
Thomas Crocker, Past President of Ventura County Cattlemen's Association
Bert Lamb, Past President of Ventura County Cattlemen's Association
Aubrey E. 'Bud' Sloan, Past President of Ventura County Cattlemen's Association
Robert Frost, Member of Ventura County Cattlemen's Association
Daisy Banda, Program Technician, USDA, Farm Services Agency
Lidia Armas, Cal EMA, Individual Assistance Branch