

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 21, 2015

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Chair
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Moran and Ranking Member Merkley:

We write to seek your assistance in demonstrating continued support from Congress to keep the U.S. Sheep Experiment Station (USSES) and its research capabilities in operation. In recent years, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has attempted to close the USSES—a facility overseen by the department's Agricultural Research Service (ARS). Pushback from Congress has kept the station in operation at the present time, but USDA proposes to close it following the conclusion of Fiscal Year (FY) 2015.

The USSES has been in existence for a century and is the only federal research facility of its kind focused on rangeland sheep production. The station also carries out research initiatives of critical importance to western agriculture beyond sheep production, including managed grazing, rangeland and ecosystem health, wildfire impacts and interactions between livestock and wildlife. Further, the unique characteristics associated with the USSES show great potential to expand the facility's mission and objectives. With regional issues being an emphasis of the research mission of ARS, this particular facility is of critical importance to western public lands states. The agency would be hard pressed to duplicate the research infrastructure found within the USSES and shutting it down would be counter to its research mission.

With the threat of closure looming, a broad coalition of interests, including livestock groups, public universities and state and local government entities, have been working to repurpose and identify a new mission for the USSES to ensure a sustainable future. To demonstrate the seriousness of this effort, the Idaho State Legislature provided \$200,000 in annual funding for research personnel earlier this year. As discussions progress with the stakeholders, keeping the facility in operation following the conclusion of FY 2015 is a high priority.

In light of these factors, we respectfully request the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee consider including language in the report accompanying the FY 2016 Agriculture Appropriations Bill demonstrating congressional support for the continuance of the USSES. We have included an example below:

USDA/ARS-U.S. Sheep Experiment Station: The Committee opposes the closure of the U.S. Sheep Experiment Station (USSES) in Dubois, ID and directs ARS to continue operations at USSES through FY 2016. The Committee further recognizes the unique and valuable contributions the USSES makes toward increasing the production efficiency of sheep and improving sustainable rangeland ecosystems. The Committee

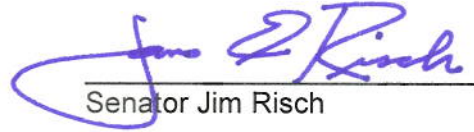
also recognizes a unique opportunity to expand important ongoing research in sage grouse habitat, fire mitigation, and integrative livestock/wildlife grazing and disease issues. The Committee recognizes efforts are underway in Idaho to propose mission improvements for USSES and encourages ARS to work with the various stakeholders.

Thank you for your consideration and please reach out should you have any questions or require additional information.

Sincerely,



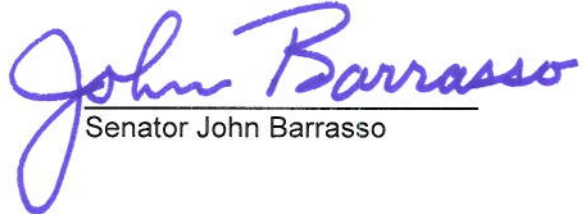
Senator Mike Crapo



Senator Jim Risch



Senator Mike Enzi



Senator John Barrasso



Senator Steve Daines