

Help is needed now for drought

Any time Mother Nature's involved, it's an iffy situation.

If you make your living in agriculture, you know the tricks weather can play.

This year is no exception. Sen. Kent Conrad, D-N.D., calls it a "slow-moving disaster." Parts of the state are struggling with drought.

Some farmers have given up on their wheat, baling it. Others have been forced to reduce their cattle herds or sell off completely because of the loss of pastures and the realization they can't afford to buy feed.

Belt-tightening is the norm. Farmers and ranchers are looking for ways to survive, not thrive.

This isn't an unusual situation. Droughts come and go. So do farmers and ranchers. But there are fewer trying to survive than in the past. It's been a high toll over the years.

State and federal officials try to ease the burden. But it's not unusual for the relief to take time.

North Dakota's governor and congressional delegation can promise to pursue aid, but they have to go through a time-consuming process.

Other states facing drought along with hurricane-battered states also are seeking relief. The nation's war on terror has been costly, so the Bush administration and Congress haven't been willing to automatically approve funds.

But it's needed, and it's needed now.

There are steps that have been taken in the past and can be taken now. But a sense of urgency is needed.

Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., pointed out recently that Conservation Reserve Program acres usually aren't released for grazing and haying until after the best forage is gone.

Hopefully, the state's delegation can push through the needed aid. Otherwise, a slow-moving Congress will add to the disaster.