



# NEWS RELEASE

## Natural Resources Conservation Service

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### **Agriculture Secretary Vilsack, Obama Administration Deliver New Drought Assistance to America's Producers**

*More than \$3.79 million Available through Natural Resources Conservation Service to Assist Arkansas Farmers*

WASHINGTON, Aug. 8, 2012 — As part of continuing steps by the Obama Administration to assist livestock producers in response to the historic drought, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today highlighted that USDA will utilize nearly \$16 million in financial and technical assistance to immediately help crop and livestock producers in 19 states cope with the adverse impacts of the historic drought.

In Arkansas, more than \$3,799,000 is available through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) managed by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The agency received \$1,799,000 for EQIP and \$2 million for WHIP assistance. Applications are being taken at county USDA service centers through Aug. 14.

“With this funding, we hope to provide some immediate relief and a catalyst for a quicker recovery,” said Mike Sullivan, NRCS state conservationist in Arkansas.

Through EQIP, farmers can apply for financial assistance to install practices designed to provide immediate drought relief. Practices include watering systems, planting of annual forages and permanent reseeding, and prescribed grazing. Several practices are also available to help with recovery from the drought. They are permanent reseeding, buffers, tree and shrub planting, and various water systems such as pipelines and ponds.

Through the WHIP funding, drought relief and recovery practices include planting of annual forages and permanent reseeding (native grasses, forbs and legumes), buffers, tree and shrub planting and various water systems.

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Landowners with a current EQIP contract can also request a contract modification to re-schedule planned conservation practices such as prescribed grazing, livestock watering facilities, water conservation and other conservation activities on pasture and forest land until drought conditions improve.

“Seeing the plight of the livestock producers, farmers and landowners, Arkansas conservation district directors went to see NRCS Chief Dave White to plea for assistance to address the impact of extraordinary drought conditions, such as loss of crops, hay and water shortages,” said Debbie Moreland, Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts program administrator.

“The Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts was instrumental in securing funding for this initiative,” Sullivan said. “Today we can see the results of a true conservation partnership dedicated to Arkansas landowners.”

While landowners statewide can apply for financial assistance, priority is given to those who have been in the exceptional drought area, defined by the National Drought Mitigation Center, the longest. A map of the areas in Arkansas is located at: <http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu>. Arkansas specific drought information is also available at <http://www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov/drought.html>.

In addition, USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) will transfer \$14 million in unobligated program funds into the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP). ECP provides emergency funding and technical assistance for farmers and ranchers to rehabilitate farmland damaged by natural disasters and for carrying out emergency water conservation measures in periods of severe drought. ECP also provides resources to help producers restore livestock fences.

“President Obama and I continue to work across the federal government to provide relief for those farmers and ranchers who are affected by the severe drought conditions impacting many states across our nation,” said Vilsack. “This additional assistance builds on a number of steps USDA has taken over the past few weeks to provide resources and flexibility in our existing programs to help producers endure these serious hardships. As this drought persists, the Obama Administration is committed to using existing authorities wherever possible to help the farmers, ranchers, small businesses, and communities being impacted.”

Yesterday in Washington, President Obama convened his White House Rural Council to review Executive Branch response actions and to develop additional policy initiatives to assist drought-stricken Americans. Following the meeting, the White House announced a number of new measures the Administration is taking, including USDA’s assistance for livestock and crop producers, the National Credit Union Administration’s increased capacity for lending to customers including farmers, and the U.S. Department of Transportation’s emergency waivers for federal truck weight regulations and hours of service requirements to drought-stricken communities. President Obama also stressed the need for the entire Administration to continue to look at further steps it can take to ease the pain of this historic drought.

Within the last month, USDA has opened the Conservation Reserve Program to emergency haying and grazing, has lowered the borrower interest rate for emergency loans, and has worked with crop insurance companies to provide more flexibility to farmers. USDA has also announced the following:

- Allowing producers to modify current EQIP contracts to allow for grazing, livestock watering, and other conservation activities to address drought conditions.
- Lowering the reduction in the annual rental payment to producers on CRP acres used for emergency haying or grazing from 25 percent to 10 percent in 2012.
- Simplifying the Secretarial disaster designation process and reduced the time it takes to designate counties affected by disasters by 40 percent.

For more information on drought assistance, visit [www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov) or call your local USDA service center listed in the telephone book under U.S. Department of Agriculture, or your local conservation district.

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