



Current Drought Resources and Information Updated August 31, 2012

Please note: Information on the current drought is updated frequently. A large collection of up-to-date information, including fact sheets for producers, is maintained publicly at [USDA's Drought Page](#). All interested stakeholders are encouraged to check the web site often.

New Announcements This Week

Secretary Vilsack's latest announcement regarding USDA Disaster Designations for impacted counties was made on August 29. You can [read more here](#).

- **On Wednesday, August 29**, Secretary Vilsack announced a two-month extension for emergency grazing on Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres, freeing up forage and feed for ranchers as they look to recover from this challenging time.
- **Also on August 29**, USDA designated 147 additional counties in 14 states as natural disaster areas—128 counties in 9 states due to drought. In the past seven weeks, USDA has designated 1,892 unduplicated counties in 38 states as disaster areas—1,820 due to drought.

Continuing Administration Efforts to Provide Drought Relief

President Obama and Secretary Vilsack are committed to taking every possible step to help farmers and ranchers recover when disaster strikes. Our thoughts are with U.S. farmers and ranchers across the United States during a time of significant drought. USDA has taken a number of measures to help, and we have been joined by a wide variety of Federal agencies in carrying out what President Obama calls “an all hands on deck” approach to helping drought-stricken Americans.

At the direction of the President, Secretary Vilsack is helping coordinate an Administration-wide response that has included: the National Credit Union Administration's increased capacity for lending to customers including farmers; the U.S. Department of Transportation's emergency waivers for federal truck weight regulations and hours of service requirements to get help to drought-stricken communities; increased outreach and emergency lending by the Small Business Administration; and more.

President Obama also has 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.

USDA continues to encourage any farmer or rancher with questions to contact a USDA Service Center office, because even with limited legal authority, USDA has worked hard to offer tools to help.

Below is a list of administrative action taken to date by USDA to help drought-stricken producers:

- On Wednesday, August 29, Secretary Vilsack announced a two-month extension for emergency grazing on Conservation Reserve Program acres, freeing up forage and feed for ranchers as they look to recover from this challenging time.
- One August 22 USDA announced it will file special provisions with the federal crop insurance program to allow haying or grazing of cover crops without impacting the insurability of planted 2013 spring crops, a move that can help provide much needed forage and feed this fall and winter for livestock producers.
- USDA announced on August 15 the availability of up to \$5 million in grants to evaluate and demonstrate agricultural practices that help farmers and ranchers adapt to drought. NRCS is taking applications for Conservation Innovation Grants to help producers build additional resiliency into their production systems.
- President Obama and Secretary Vilsack traveled to Iowa in August to announce USDA's intent to purchase up to \$170 million of pork, lamb, chicken, and catfish for federal food nutrition assistance programs, including food banks, which will help relieve pressure on American livestock producers and bring the nation's meat supply in line with demand.
- To assist producers facing extreme drought conditions, USDA is utilizing nearly \$16 million in financial and technical assistance funding under the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to help crop and livestock producers in 19 states cope with the adverse impacts of the historic drought.
- In addition, USDA is initiating a transfer of \$14 million in unobligated program funds into the Emergency Conservation Program. These funds can be used to assist in moving water to livestock in need and rehabilitating lands severely impacted by the drought.
- Allowing additional acres under CRP to be used for [emergency haying or grazing](#). The action allows lands that are not yet classified as "under severe drought" but that are "abnormally dry" to be used for haying and grazing.
- Allowing producers to modify current [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) contracts to allow for grazing, livestock watering, and other conservation activities to address drought conditions.
- Authorizing haying and grazing of [Wetlands Reserve Program](#) (WRP) easement areas in drought-affected areas where haying and grazing is consistent with conservation of wildlife habitat and wetlands. USDA has expedited its authorization process for this haying and grazing.
- Encouraging crop insurance companies to provide a short grace period for farmers on unpaid insurance premiums, as some farming families can be expected to struggle to make ends meet at the close of the crop year. (Secretary Vilsack announced on August 1

that crop insurance companies have agreed to provide a short grace period for farmers on insurance premiums in 2012.)

- Reducing the [emergency loan](#) interest rate from 3.75 percent to 2.25 percent. USDA has also modified emergency loans, allowing loans to be made earlier in the season helping livestock producers to offset increased feed costs and those who have liquidated herds.
- 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.

You can always visit www.usda.gov/drought for the latest information.

Actions by Other Federal Agencies to Respond to Drought

NATIONAL CREDIT UNION ADMINISTRATION

Allowing an additional 1,000 Credit Unions to increase their lending to small

businesses: The National Credit Union Administration will announce that more than 1,000 credit unions are eligible for a low-income designation, which permits unlimited lending to small business owners including farmers; nearly half of those eligible credit unions are located in a severely drought-stricken state. Small business lending by credit unions is normally capped at the statutory 12.25 percent rate. This designation exempts designated credit unions from this cap. Currently, approximately 1,100 CUs are designated low-income and can offer unlimited lending to small businesses. The average credit union member business loan is \$223,000.

SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (WITH USDA AND THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE)

Community Outreach Events: SBA, USDA, and the Department of Commerce (DOC) through its Economic Development Administration (EDA), will host targeted events in communities severely impacted by the drought to provide detailed information on what federal resources are available to assist small businesses, farmers, and others in the community. These events will also be webcast to ensure audiences in other drought impacted communities can attend virtually. At these events SBA disaster assistance staff, small business counselors from its network of resource partners, and field staff from SBA district offices along with interagency staff will provide information and offer technical assistance on applying for loans and where to find additional resources after the event.

Leverage State and County Fairs in Regions: In addition to the standalone events, SBA, USDA, and EDA will conduct outreach at already scheduled State and Country Fairs.

Online Outreach: Since the drought's full impact may take months to be fully felt by small businesses and communities, SBA, USDA, and DOC will continue to reach out to affected regions through online webinars and conference calls that will further raise awareness and provide opportunity to gather real-time detail on the impact to communities.

Small Business Administration Drought Disaster Declarations. To date, the Small Business Administration (SBA) has followed USDA's disaster declarations and has issued agency declarations covering more than 1,630 counties, providing a pathway for small businesses, small agricultural cooperatives and non-farm small businesses that are economically affected by the drought in their community to apply for SBA's Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL). Click [here](#) to find out if your county has been declared a drought disaster area.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Grazing on Federal Lands: The Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management and the USDA Forest Service are providing relief to ranchers who graze on public lands by employing flexibility to accommodate needs and conditions on the ground. BLM will issue refunds to cattlemen that were displaced by early season fires and therefore not able to make use of their allotments and the Forest Service has liberally granted Permittee requested non-use.

Both agencies are making vacant land available for grazing and allowing for: changes in grazing use, including delayed or early turnout if conditions allow; increased salting to improve livestock distribution; water hauling and temporary portable water troughs; and other measures.

ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

Army Corps of Engineers Preserving Navigation: The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has published guidance to coordinate a collective Common Operation Picture (COP) to monitor ongoing drought impacts on navigation. At this time they have identified the 15 most critical river gages (of 2000+) as key monitors for navigation impacts and implemented Water Way Action Plans. USACE will continue coordinating with Coast Guard, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and navigation industries on the mitigation of drought impacts by:

- Working with contract dredges to identify areas of concern to divert resources based on priority.
- Identifying available channel depths and widths to navigation industries, so barge tow drafts and widths can be modified accordingly.
- Ensuring that storage reservoirs are releasing flow to augment natural flows downstream. Continuing to do public and media outreach via, conference calls, webinars and emails with respect to the Mississippi, Missouri, and Ohio rivers and tributaries.
- Monitoring the National Weather Service outlook on short and long term rainfall forecast to prepare for potential reservoir releases are other mitigation measures.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Existing Emergency Exemptions of Federal Operating Requirements: This authority can put more commercial drivers behind the wheel—driving large trucks needed to assist the farmers and ranchers in need. If a qualifying drought emergency has been declared in a state by the Governor or appropriate official, the state automatically gets Hours of Service and other regulatory relief for those providing emergency assistance; no application is needed. If the situation does not qualify for emergency relief, the Federal rules regulating large truck and bus operations may be waived in certain circumstances. DOT can process a request to waive regulations in 7-14 days.

In addition, the transportation bill President Obama signed in July provides a new authority for States to issue special permits for overweight vehicles and loads that can easily be dismantled or divided in an emergency. The legislation makes the new special permits available beginning October 1, 2012. DOT is expediting the process of developing guidance for States to support their permitting programs, and the way in which “relief supplies” are defined may provide states with a new tool to use for hauling heavy loads of grain, livestock, etc. for drought relief.

DOT Outreach to the State DOTs: On Wednesday August 1, U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood convened a call with states to listen and discuss the ways in which DOT can work with Governors and State Departments of Transportation to help communities impacted by the drought. Issues raised during the call included emergency waivers of hours of service requirements and emergency waivers for Federal truck weight regulations.

The August 7 White House Fact Sheet on Drought Relief is available [here](#).

Additional Data and Information

Background: [NASS Crop Condition Report \(8/27 for the week ending August 26\)](#):

Soybeans rated poor to very poor were at 38 percent last week, up one percent from the previous week. 52 percent of the nation's corn remained at poor or very poor condition, up one percent from the previous week. Range/pasture once again remained steady at 59% very poor to poor. Prior to this year, this highest value had been 52% in Sep. 2002 – but records of this type only go back to 1995.

Background: [U.S. Drought Monitor \(8/30\)](#):

Once again, there is very little change this week. U.S. corn in drought slipped a percentage point to 85%, several points below the July 24 peak of 89%. U.S. soybeans in drought likewise dropped 1 percentage point to 82%, below the July 24 peak of 88%. Crops and cattle in exceptional drought (D4) decreased slightly – 8% of the corn, 9% of the soybeans, 10% of the hay, and 13% of the cattle. Overall continental U.S. drought coverage currently stands at 62.89%, down from last week's 63.20% and below the July 24 record of 63.86%.

Additional Resources

For more information regarding the ongoing drought, USDA's efforts to help impacted farmers and ranchers, and other useful information, you can always check the USDA's [Disaster and Drought Assistance](#) webpage for regular updates. Below are some recent updates and other relevant items from USDA regarding the ongoing drought:

Infographics:

[U.S. Drought and Your Food Costs](#)

[Resilience of American Agriculture - Innovation, Diversity and Growing Markets](#)

Photos:

[White House Rural Council Meeting 7/27/12](#)

[Flickr Collections- Drought](#)

USDA Radio:

Radio information is updated daily at the [USDA Radio Newslines and Newslines Archives](#) and includes a wide variety of drought and related information.

Web Information Resources

[Disaster Designation Map \(8/29/12\)](#)

[Emergency Preparedness and Response Page](#)

[USDA's Drought Page](#)

[Agricultural Weather Updates](#)

[ERS Website](#)