

Phillips County eligible for disaster designation due to drought conditions

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

Last week, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack designated 597 counties in 14 states as primary natural disaster areas due to drought and heat, making all qualified farm operators in the areas eligible for low-interest emergency loans. These are the first disaster designations made by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 2013.

The 597 primary counties designated as disaster areas correspond to the following states: Alabama 14, Arkansas 47, Arizona 4, Colorado 30, Georgia 92, Hawaii 2, Kansas 88, Oklahoma 76, Missouri 31, New Mexico 19, Nevada 9, South Carolina 11, Texas 157 and Utah 17.

Colorado U.S. Senator Michael Bennet welcomed the announcement from the U.S. Department of Agriculture that it has designated 43 of Colorado's 64 counties as disaster areas due to ongoing severe drought conditions.

The designations mean that farmers and ranchers in these counties are eligible for additional Farm Service Agency assistance. The FSA administers farm commodity, crop insurance, credit, environmental, conservation and emergency assistance programs for farmers and ranchers.

Producers in counties designated as primary or contiguous disaster areas are eligible to be considered for FSA emergency loans.

Colorado counties eligible for assistance include Adams, Alamosa, Arapahoe, Baca, Bent, Boulder, Broomfield, Chaffee, Cheyenne, Clear Creek, Costilla, Crowley, Custer, Denver, Douglas, Eagle, Elbert, El Paso, Fremont, Gunnison, Huerfano, Jefferson, Kiowa, Kit Carson, Lake, Larimer, Las Animas, Lincoln, Logan, Morgan, Otero, Park, Phillips, Pitkin, Prowers, Pueblo, Saguache, Sedgwick, Summit, Teller, Washington, Weld and Yuma.

Colorado producers seeking assistance should contact their local Farm Service Agency office.

"As drought persists, USDA will continue to partner with producers to see them through

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longer-term recovery, while taking the swift actions needed to help farmers and ranchers prepare their land and operations for the upcoming planting season,” said Vilsack.

“I will also continue to work with Congress to encourage passage of a Food, Farm and Jobs bill that gives rural America the long-term certainty they need, including a strong and defensible safety net.”

The 597 counties have shown a drought intensity value of at least D2 (Severe Drought) for eight consecutive weeks based on U.S. Drought Monitor measurements, providing for an automatic designation.

The Drought Monitor is produced in partnership by USDA, the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. It helps USDA determine county disaster designations due to drought. The Drought Monitor measures drought intensity on a scale from D1 to D4.

In 2012, USDA designated 2,245 counties in 39 states as disaster areas due to drought, or 71 percent of the U.S.

At the height of the 2012 drought, the secretary announced a series of aggressive USDA actions to get help to farmers, ranchers and businesses impacted by the 2012 drought.

This included lowering the interest rate for emergency loans, working with crop insurance companies to provide flexibility to farmers and expanding the use of Conservation Reserve Program acres for haying and grazing, which opened 2.8 million acres and brought nearly \$200 million in forage for all livestock producers during a critical period.

Many of those same actions continue to bring relief to producers ahead of the 2013 planting season.

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