

## **IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Governor Request USDA Action to Improve Drought Response**

**Topeka** – Kansas Governor Sam Brownback sent a letter this week to U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, requesting USDA action to improve drought response and alleviate the impact of the severe drought on Kansas producers and livestock.

“While touring drought stricken counties last week, I heard concerns from producers and agency personnel regarding drought response from USDA and private crop insurance providers,” Gov. Brownback said. “We want to work with USDA to address these issues and help Kansans deal with this devastating drought.”

The Governor toured Morton, Stevens and Seward Counties last week with Kansas Agriculture Secretary Dale Rodman and Kansas Water Office Director Tracy Streeter. One major concern they heard about was a lack of communication related to crop insurance.

Producers were especially frustrated about having to continue applying irrigation water to a failing or failed crop until insurance appraisers arrive. In his letter, the Governor requested that actions to improve crop insurance response include USDA encouraging Approved Insurance Providers to respond as quickly as possible to producers who have given a potential Notice of Loss and creating a drought response team to help with interagency coordination.

“Conversations with Kansans in drought areas have revealed issues with crop insurance, preventive planting eligibility determinations, USDA disaster benefits, and Conservation Reserve Program haying and grazing,” Secretary Rodman said. “I appreciate the governor's leadership urging USDA to address these serious concerns.”

Gov. Brownback's letter also addressed difficulty in acquiring a Preventive Planning designation for when it is too dry to plant a dryland crop. To assist in this, he is asking Kansas State University Extension Service to provide guidance on conditions that warrant a determination.

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“The USDA agencies, KSU Research & Extension and the conservation districts are the sole means of delivering federal program information to Kansas farmers and ranchers,” Streeter said. “It is incumbent all of us find ways to improve our coordination and communication, especially in these critical drought conditions.”

Another issue raised during last week’s drought tour is how the USDA currently requires several months of drought conditions determined by the U.S. Drought Monitor before producers are eligible to receive USDA disaster benefits. This drought clock is reset at the beginning of each year. Gov. Brownback recommended to Sec. Vilsack that USDA accounting of drought durations continue from one year to the next.

Gov. Brownback also recommended additional flexibility for haying and grazing land in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). While CRP acreage can be hayed and grazed in a drought emergency, there are significant limitations. Suggestions to improve flexibility include waiving the 25 percent payment reduction for emergency haying and grazing, expanding the currently allowed 300-foot mowed or tilled buffer to protect buildings from wildfires, allowing CRP grass mowed for fire buffers to be fed to livestock and permitting CRP acres to be mowed and baled in non-drought areas if donated as feed for livestock in drought areas.

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