

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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For more information, contact:

Sherriene Jones-Sontag
Kansas Office of Governor
785.368.7138 (office)
785.338.3015 (mobile)
media@ks.gov

Chelsea Good
Kansas Dept. of Agriculture
785.296.2653 (office)
913.735.9065 (mobile)
chelsea.good@kda.ks.gov

Katie Patterson-Ingels
Kansas Water Office
785.296.0877
Katie.Ingels@kwo.ks.gov

Governor Tours Drought Stricken Counties in SW Kansas

Topeka – Kansas Governor Sam Brownback today toured three drought stricken counties in southwest Kansas. Agriculture Secretary Dale Rodman, Kansas Water Office Director and Chair of the Governor’s Drought Response Team Tracy Streeter joined the Governor as they met with residents and community leaders in Morton, Stevens and Seward Counties.

“There’s been less rainfall this year than in the peak of the 1930s Dust Bowl with the same heat and wind. Hats off to the producers for being such good stewards,” Governor Brownback said. “These below normal precipitation patterns continue across much of Kansas - depleting available soil moisture and stream flow conditions. The situation is serious. Today’s tour will help us gather information about the drought’s impact.”

Issues discussed during the community meetings in Elkhart, Hugoton and Liberal today included insurance concerns; water law and possible changes to it; five year flex accounts; and drought emergency term permits that are available.

“Witnessing the conditions firsthand and visiting with affected farmers, ranchers and local officials is important in identifying what the state can do to help,” said Streeter, who also chairs the Governor’s Drought Response Team. “In addition to the effects on agriculture, I am interested in ensuring the public water supply needs continue to be met for our local communities coping with this drought.”

The group also met with Morton County farmer Bill Light and toured his family owned farm to see firsthand drought’s impact.

“The severe drought is taking a toll on Kansas farmers and ranchers,” Secretary Rodman said. “At the Department of Agriculture, we are committed to helping stakeholders deal with the hardships this drought creates by offering options such as the 2011 emergency term permits allowing water right holders to borrow from their 2012 allocation. We will continue to work with our partner agencies to advocate for the needs of Kansas producers.”

Governor Brownback has issued a state drought emergency declaration that puts Stanton, Morton and Stevens on emergency status. The declaration also list 36 counties on warning status and 23 counties on watch status. The Governor’s declaration authorizes and directs all agencies under his jurisdiction to implement the appropriate watch or warning level-drought response actions assigned in the Operations Plan of the Governor’s Drought Response Team.

U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack also has granted two federal drought disaster declarations requested by Governor Brownback that cover 46 Kansas counties as well as 26 contiguous counties.

This is the second drought tour for Governor Brownback this year. On May 4th, the Governor, Sec. Rodman and Mr. Streeter took an aerial drought tour of Haskell, Gray and Meade counties in southwest Kansas and met with residents and leaders in those counties.

For more detailed information about current conditions, see the Kansas Climate Summary and Drought Report on the Kansas Water Office website at: www.kwo.org.

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