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California Farmers & Ranchers Offered Drought Help

\$20 million available to protect parched landscapes and stretch scarce water

DAVIS, Calif. Feb. 4, 2014 – USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service is providing information for farmers and ranchers interested in applying for the \$20 million in drought assistance announced by USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack last Tuesday, Feb. 4. Farmers and ranchers should consult with their local NRCS offices as soon as possible in order to apply for assistance by the March 3, 2014, deadline.

"In recent days many farmers and ranchers have visited one of our 55 California offices seeking help from the drought," said Carlos Suarez, California State Conservationist for NRCS. "Unfortunately, we don't have a magic wand, but we do have a toolbox of scientifically vetted conservation practices that have helped in many past droughts, including 2009," said Suarez. "We can help farmers and ranchers understand the options for their particular water situation, soil type and production goals and develop a plan to get through this drought."

The top priority will go to helping farmers without access to water who need to protect fragile, uncovered soil, according to Suarez. "There are options such as cover crops, surface roughening, residue management, mulching and other practices we can recommend. And there are payments available for farmers willing to adopt these critical steps to keep our essential topsoil from becoming a wind-borne, dust hazard," said Suarez.

To help ranchers suffering from drought conditions, NRCS can offer practices such as livestock well development, piping, troughs, and fencing. "For some ranchers this may allow livestock to take advantage of available grass while protecting vulnerable ranch resources," said Suarez.

Finally, for farmers who have access to water and want to make every drop count, NRCS can provide improved irrigation hardware with an irrigation management plan to optimize efficiency.

This drought assistance package is being funded through NRCS's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) that shares the cost of conservation practices with agricultural producers willing to voluntarily invest in conserving natural resources on their farm or ranch.

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) is also providing drought assistance through the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP). Farmers and ranchers are encouraged to consult with the Agency to gain a full understanding of the drought assistance options available from both Agencies. FSA and NRCS are often co-located in service centers throughout California.



To hear an audio clip of State Conservationist Carlos Suarez discuss NRCS' drought response go to <https://soundcloud.com/#nrscs-california/carlos-suarez-usda-nrcs>.

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