

## **Agriculture Secretary Vilsack Announces Disaster Assistance to Producers and Communities in 33 States and Puerto Rico**

*Funding Will Help Producers, Landowners and Communities Rebuild and Repair Damaged Land after Year of Extreme Weather*

WASHINGTON, Jan. 18, 2012—Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced today an important package of disaster assistance to help farmers, land owners, communities and others recover and rebuild after a year in which a wave of natural disasters swept across all regions of the United States. The funding, totaling \$308 million, provides financial and technical assistance to help rebuild and repair land damaged on account of flooding, drought, tornadoes and other natural disasters in 33 states and Puerto Rico. Funding is provided by the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) as well as the Farm Service Agency's Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) and Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP).

“Landowners, individuals and communities have endured incredible hardships because of the intensity and volume of natural disasters that have impacted their livelihoods,” said Vilsack. “America’s farmers and rural communities are vitally important to our nation’s economy, producing the food, feed, fiber and fuel that continue to help us grow. This funding will help to rebuild communities, while states can use the funds to carry out emergency recovery measures. At the same time, this assistance keeps farmers on the farm, ranchers on the ranch, and landowners on their land, helping to keep American agriculture profitable.”

The Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program will contribute \$215.7 million to provide financial and technical assistance to address public safety and restoration efforts on private, public and tribal lands. When funding is allocated to a project, NRCS contracts the heavy construction work to local contractors, spurring creation of jobs. Typical projects funded under EWP include removing debris from waterways, protecting eroded stream banks, reseeding damaged areas, and in some cases, purchasing floodplain easements on eligible land. A list of states and their fiscal year 2012 EWP Program allocations can be viewed at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/landscape/ewpp>.

The Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) program will contribute \$80 million to producers to help remove debris from farmland, restore livestock fences and conservation structures, provide water for livestock during periods of severe drought, and grade and shape farmland damaged by a natural disaster. FSA county committees determine eligibility based on on-site inspections of damaged land and considering the type and extent of damage. For land to be eligible, the natural disaster must create new conservation problems.

The Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP) program will provide \$12 million in payments to eligible owners of nonindustrial private forest (NIPF) land in order to carry out emergency measures to restore land damaged by a natural disaster.

A list of states and their fiscal year 2012 ECP and EFRP allocations can be viewed at [http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA\\_File/20120108\\_ecp\\_eftp\\_table.pdf](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/20120108_ecp_eftp_table.pdf).

USDA works with state and local governments and private landowners to conserve and protect our nation's natural resources – helping preserve our land and clean our air and water. In 2010, President Obama launched the America's Great Outdoors initiative to foster a 21<sup>st</sup> century approach to conservation that is designed by and accomplished in partnership with the American people. During the past two years, USDA's conservation agencies—NRCS, FSA and the U.S. Forest Service—have delivered technical assistance and implemented restoration practices on public and private lands. At the same time, USDA is working to better target conservation investments to embrace locally driven conservation and entering partnerships that focus on large, landscape-scale conservation. In 2011, USDA enrolled a record number of acres of private working lands in conservation programs, working with more than 500,000 farmers and ranchers to implement conservation practices that clean the air we breathe, filter the water we drink, and prevent soil erosion.

The Obama Administration, with Agriculture Secretary Vilsack's leadership, has worked tirelessly to strengthen rural America, implement the Farm Bill, maintain a strong farm safety net, and create opportunities for America's farmers and ranchers. U.S. agriculture is currently experiencing one of its most productive periods in American history thanks to the productivity, resiliency, and resourcefulness of our producers.

A strong farm safety net is important to sustain the success of American agriculture. To help keep American agriculture profitable, USDA immediately responds to disasters across the country, ranging from record floods, droughts and tropical storms, with direct support, disaster assistance, technical assistance, and access to credit. For example, USDA's crop insurance program insures 264 million acres, 1.14 million policies, and \$110 billion worth of liability on about 500,000 farms. Over the past 3 years, USDA has paid out about \$17.2 billion in crop insurance indemnities to more than 325,000 farmers who lost crops due to natural disasters. And in response to tighter financial markets, USDA has expanded the availability of farm credit, helping struggling farmers refinance loans. In the past 3 years, USDA provided 103,000 loans to family farmers totaling \$14.6 billion. Over 50 percent of the loans went to beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

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