

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 2, 2012

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500

Mr. President:

We are writing to urge additional action to address the crippling drought impacting the United States. As you know, lack of rainfall coupled with high temperatures has led to drought conditions in nearly every region of the country. The drought continues to intensify with each passing week. During the month of July, over half of the land area of the United States has remained in a state of at least moderate drought.

Due to the wide ranging impacts, and the diverse needs arising from the ongoing drought, we ask that you immediately convene an Interagency Drought Task Force to bring together all agencies of government that have responsibilities related to agriculture, public lands, energy, water, public health, and emergency response, as well as the Office of Management and Budget. We urge you to direct the task force to report as soon as possible on the severity of the drought, the impacts and expected impacts to all sectors of the economy, the options available to address drought under current law, and fiscally-responsible recommendations for Congressional action to further assist those impacted by drought.

Many states where agriculture is the key economic activity are experiencing the most severe conditions. According to the Department of Agriculture, 62 percent of farms are located in areas experiencing drought. Many livestock producers are being forced to decide whether to continue to feed their livestock in light of declining forage availability and extremely high feed costs or liquidate otherwise productive livestock herds. In addition, while most crop farmers have managed some portion of their risks through the Federal Crop Insurance program, many will still suffer significant economic losses due to the severity of the drought. While we appreciate your direct acknowledgement of the significance of the drought and the actions you and Secretary Vilsack have taken to help mitigate this disaster, we recognize that the lack of adequate statutory authority and funding may be limiting the Administration's response for production agriculture and our other natural resource sectors.

Drought impact is felt beyond agriculture. The hot, dry conditions have already led to an extremely early beginning to the wildfire season in the west. Many people have been displaced by fire, weeks before the official beginning of the fire season. Over 3 million acres across the country have been impacted by wildfire this year. In addition to wildfire and decreased agricultural output, water uses including municipal water, energy extraction, power generation, irrigation, navigation and tourism are all impacted by declining water availability and quality.

In short, this drought will have consequences on many sectors of the American economy, and it requires the cooperation of many parts of our government. Thus, we ask that you convene an Interagency Drought Task Force as soon as possible. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

<u>Joe Testa</u>	<u>Clara Kim</u>
<u>Therese Lounsbury</u>	<u>Myra Bowers</u>
<u>Amy Klobuchar</u>	<u>Mark Udall</u>
<u>Herb Kohl</u>	<u>Tom Udare</u>
<u>Al Franken</u>	<u>Mark Royce</u>
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