

November 21, 2019

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
USDA
1400 Independence Ave., SW, Room 5105-A
Washington, DC 20250

Mr. Matthew Lohr
USDA, NRCS, Office of the Chief
1400 Independence Ave., SW, Room 5105-A
Washington, DC 20250

Mr. Richard Fordyce
USDA, Farm Services Agency
1400 Independence Ave., SW, STOP 0506
Washington, DC 20250

Re: Western Chambers Call for a Drought Initiative

Dear Secretary Perdue, Chief Lohr, and Administrator Fordyce:

We write today in support of the 2018 Farm Bill drought initiative provisions. When fully implemented, these provisions give states and producers the tools necessary to respond effectively to drought and enable implementation of essential components of the Drought Contingency Plan (DCP) agreement passed earlier this year by the Arizona State Legislature. The Arizona business community needs stability and certainty in order to make growth decisions in the state. The DCP represents a critically important step toward a sustainable and reliable water future for the Arizona business community, and now prompt strategic implementation of 2018 Farm Bill drought provisions to support that agreement is necessary to continue that progress.

Our organizations represent hundreds of businesses in the state of Arizona concerned about drought and committed to drought contingency planning (DCP). Our chambers engaged in the DCP process with Arizona Governor Ducey and state legislators and are committed to continuing to work on issues of drought for the health of our state's economy and rivers. More than 35 million people rely on the Colorado River and its tributaries for their water, and these waters irrigate over five million acres of ranch and farmland, providing food and forage for states across the country.

The economic importance of the Colorado River has been estimated at over \$1 trillion annually.¹ However, despite an exceptionally wet winter in 2018-2019, with snowpack in the river's headwaters over 130% of normal in most of the basin, storage in lakes Powell and Mead remains at historic lows.² The cumulative effect of nineteen years of drought and increasing demands and pressures on the Colorado have led to these challenging times.

Drought Initiatives to Implement 2018 Farm Bill

While these challenges are significant we are aware that the 2018 Farm Bill created important new opportunities for Western irrigators and rural communities with key provisions in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Operations Program (PL-566, or Watershed Act), and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). Taken together, these provisions provide for multi-benefit projects which aid both producers and the environment, more streamlined processes to develop and implement projects, innovative programs designed to significantly reduce consumptive water use, and expanded funding for infrastructure and restoration projects.

Preparing for Drought Costs Less than Emergency Drought Response

These programs and expanded provisions not only allow producers to proactively address drought-related risks and concerns, but the preventative measures included in the 2018 Conservation Title are fiscally responsible methods for addressing drought. Drought accounts for \$4 billion in crop insurance payments annually and “is now the single largest cause of U.S. farm production losses.”³ Outlays for the entirety of the Conservation Title are estimated at approximately \$5.7 billion per year over the next five years, only a portion of which would fund these key drought provisions.⁴ By expeditiously implementing the Conservation Title, the programs funded under the drought provisions would help avoid some of the detrimental financial impacts of a drought, and help lessen the need to respond—to much greater financial burden—in the middle of a drought.

Agricultural producers are important contributors to the nation's economy and culture, and it is that leadership that contributed to bipartisan support of the 2018 Farm Bill in Congress. Our organizations stand together in calling for a drought initiative to facilitate implementation of the drought authorities contained in the 2018 Farm Bill.

¹ Tim James, Anthony Evans, and Cary Kelly, *The Economic Importance of the Colorado River to the Basin Region*, L. William Siedman Research Institute, W.P. Carey School of Business, Arizona State University, 18 December 2014, p. iii

² John Fleck, “[What a Good Water Year Looks Like](#),” JFleck at Instain, 15 March 2019

³ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁴ Congressional Research Service, “Budget Issues That Shaped the 2018 Farm Bill,” R45425, 28 February 2019, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R45425.pdf>, accessed 17 October 2019.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. We look forward to working with you to bring these opportunities to the ground in the Colorado River Basin. We would be happy to meet with you to discuss these recommendations further at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,



Glenn Hamer
CEO
Arizona Chamber of Commerce & Industry



Todd Chambers
CEO
Greater Phoenix Chamber



Julie Pastrick
President/CEO
Greater Flagstaff Chamber of Commerce



Olivia Ainza-Kramer
President & CEO
Nogales-Santa Cruz County Chamber of Commerce



John Courtis
Executive Director
Yuma County Chamber of Commerce

CC: Senator Martha McSally

Senator Kyrsten Sinema

Bill Northey, USDA, Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation

Kevin Norton, Associate Chief, NRCS Farm Production and Conservation

Chris Hess, USDA Chief of Staff

Jimmy Bramblett, USDA Deputy Chief for Programs

Astor Boozer, USDA Regional Conservationist – West

Faith Burns, USDA Policy Advisor, Farm Production and Conservation

Martin Bomar, USDA FSA

Misty Jones, USDA FSA

Adam Tarr, Senior Professional Staff, Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee

Rosalyn Brummette, Policy Analyst, Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee

Patrick Donovan, Senator Bennet's Office, Ranking Member, Conservation, Forestry, and

Natural Resources Subcommittee