

WORD FROM WASHINGTON

Drought Aid Saving Many Farmers, Ranchers And Resources

(NAPSA)—Severe drought has swept through all 50 states this year, inflicting damage on crops and cattle production and contributing to erosion. In response, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) is providing disaster assistance to farmers and ranchers in need nationwide. Since late summer, programs totaling over \$2 billion funds in aid have been announced. Both traditional programs as well as new ones came to the rescue for farmers and ranchers.

"Recent rains came too late to rescue Maryland's grain crop. This drought, one of the worst in more than a century, will cost many farmers up to 75 percent of their income," said Steven Connelly, Maryland FSA State Executive Director. "These programs are a huge relief, and people leave our office feeling a lot better about their options."

The drought was especially tough for livestock producers, who don't typically benefit from disaster relief programs. FSA implemented a new Livestock Compensation Program, totaling nearly \$800 million, serving cattle, sheep, buffalo and goat producers.

Cow-calf operators in Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming and South Dakota also received an additional \$150 million from the feed assistance program. The Emergency Conservation Program, the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program and the Emergency Loan Program will also provide financial assistance to eligible producers affected by natural disasters. And recently the agency announced an Emer-



America's farmers and ranchers are struggling through one of the worst droughts of the last century.

gency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) to help restore natural resources.

In addition to relief funds, FSA is encouraging producers to share resources. FSA developed the Hay Net Web site (www.usda.fsa.gov) where producers can list their need for hay or hay available for sale or donation. CRP participants have been authorized to use some conserved lands for emergency haying and grazing. CRP participants without livestock may donate, rent or lease their hay or haying or grazing privileges.

"It's our hope that, in the American tradition of neighbor helping neighbor," said Farm Service Agency Administrator James Little, "CRP participants in areas not affected will be able to help those in need. These and other FSA programs will provide feed and forage to producers who've lost hay stocks and grazing lands in the recent disasters."

To learn more, visit the Web site at www.fsa.usda.gov.