



USDA provides extra \$10 mil. for drought-stricken California farmers

By Agri-Pulse Staff

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Fresno, March 4 –Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has pledged additional funding to assist California agricultural producers struggling to cope with drought-related water cutoffs. Dave White, Chief of USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), made the announcement Thursday on Vilsack’s behalf during a visit to California to meet with and listen to the needs of farmers.

“With the challenges to California farmers caused by three years of drought, we are making available much-needed assistance to some of the hardest hit producers,” White said. “This funding will help farmers deal with the current conditions, such as preventing dust and wind erosion in fallowed areas and keeping trees and vines alive.”

White announced that USDA would provide \$10 million through a special drought initiative under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). The EQIP funding will build on the \$3 million NRCS provided to drought-stricken areas in 2009 by continuing last year’s assistance and adding the option of converting farms to highly water-efficient micro-irrigation systems.

USDA is providing financial assistance through NRCS according to an established payment schedule to put these drought-mitigating practices more within the reach of producers in the affected areas. California counties eligible for drought assistance include Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Tulare. Signup for the drought initiative begins immediately and will run through April 9.

Ed Burton, State Conservationist for NRCS in California said the agency would work with partners to balance the funds available through the drought initiative. Burton will be consulting with the State Technical Committee in coming weeks on how to best allocate the money to projects around the state.

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