

News from Senator

BOB DOLE



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DOLE/KASSEBAUM URGE USDA TO PREPARE FOR KANSAS DROUGHT

WASHINGTON -- In a letter to Secretary of Agriculture Clayton Yeutter, Senators Bob Dole and Nancy Kassebaum (R-Ks) today urged the Department of Agriculture (USDA) to take immediate precautionary measures to help farmers cope with the persistent drought conditions developing throughout much of Kansas.

"Three-quarters of the Kansas crop has been rated poor to very poor. Despite a significant increase in seeding last fall, early estimates indicate actual production may be far below last year's reduced level. The absence of any noticeable rain in the near future combined with a drought-reduced harvest could impose a severe financial burden on many winter wheat producers who could be faced with lower deficiency payments and fewer bushels to sell," said Dole and Kassebaum. They also noted that the 90 day March-May weather outlook showed prospects of continued dry weather and high temperatures.

"We urge the Department to begin to immediately explore drought-relief options that could be made available to producers and the potential budgetary impact of these options. It would be helpful to have the Department's figures regarding possible budgetary savings resulting from lower deficiency payments and reduced yields that could be applied towards disaster payments or through extending the 1988 Disaster Assistance Act to crops that were planted in the 1988 calendar year.

In addition, the Dole-Kassebaum letter urged USDA to implement the following provisions:

- * Immediate declaration of haying and grazing on a year-around basis to allow producers who own livestock or are short on pasture or feed to take advantage of haying and grazing opportunities during the five principle growing months.
- * Allow haying and grazing designation on a state-wide basis, rather than a county by county basis.
- * ASCS should begin to immediately process "failed acre" applications with the goal of allowing producers enough time once failed acres are verified to plant oats and/or other crops.

Dole and Kassebaum indicated they would continue to explore these and other options should the current weather prospects continue and the winter wheat crop face further deterioration. The Senators urged producers to consider crop insurance for spring-planted crops.