



NEWS RELEASE

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PRESIDENT CLINTON ANNOUNCES AGRICULTURE DISASTER ASSISTANCE FOR ALL FLORIDA COUNTIES

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla., July 9, 1998—President Bill Clinton today announced disaster assistance for all Florida counties, making additional help available to agricultural producers whose crops have been ravaged by drought and wildfires. Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman joined the President in Daytona Beach for the announcement following a tour of affected areas.

In addition to the 475,000 acres scorched by recent fires—including 155,000 acres of forest land valued at \$185 million—some 600,000 acres of summer crops across the State have been severely affected by prolonged drought. An additional 1.2 million acres of grazing land have been severely damaged.

“Extreme conditions such as these call for swift and decisive action,” Clinton said. “My administration will do all that we can to assist Florida farmers and ranchers to recover from this extraordinary disaster.”

This declaration makes all Florida farmers who have suffered a 30 percent loss of normal production eligible for Farm Service Agency emergency farm loans. To qualify, producers must be creditworthy but unable to obtain credit elsewhere and must have adequate security. USDA estimates that 18,000 producers in the state have incurred losses of up to \$160 million. Damage to the Florida corn crop is estimated at 95 percent, and for many other crops yields are projected to be only 10 percent of normal.

USDA also will help producers rebuild fences and otherwise rehabilitate farmland damaged by the recent fires. The Emergency Conservation Program provides a cost share of 64 percent of the first \$62,500, and 40 percent of the next \$62,500, of the cost of rehabilitating farmland damaged by natural disasters.

USDA's Risk Management Agency reports that crop insurance policies covering about 750,000 acres of tomatoes, potatoes, peanuts, nursery crop, and citrus are in force with a total insurance liability approaching \$700 million. Producers with insurance will be covered for losses due to both fire and drought.

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"When natural disasters strike, USDA employees stand ready to help," Glickman said. "Whether fire, drought, or flood, we can and will respond quickly to provide food assistance, firefighting personnel and equipment, and help to producers."

Glickman noted that USDA's Food and Nutrition Service has provided food from its School Lunch Program stocks to the American Red Cross to help provide more than 5,000 meals to Florida residents forced from their homes by recent wildfires.

USDA's Forest Service has more than 1,500 firefighting personnel and hundreds of pieces of firefighting equipment from national forests across the nation in Florida to assist with state and local firefighting efforts.

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