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Remarks Following a Meeting of the White House Rural Council

August 7, 2012

Okay, good afternoon, everybody. I think all of you are aware that we are seeing devastating drought throughout the country. It is a historic drought, and it's having a profound impact on farmers and ranchers all across many States.

Now, at my direction, the Department of Agriculture, led by Secretary Vilsack, has been working with every other agency across the Federal Government to make sure that we are taking every single possible step to help farmers and ranchers to fight back and recover from this disaster.

We've already designated over a hundred—1,500 counties across 32 States as disaster areas, which gives qualified farmers access to low-interest emergency loans. We've also opened up more land for haying and grazing. And we've worked with crop insurance companies to give farmers a short grace period on unpaid insurance premiums, since some families will be struggling to make ends meet at the end of this crop year.

This has been an all-hands-on-deck response. I want to thank Tom for his leadership. But obviously, we've got a lot more to do, because a lot of folks are being affected by this.

So today the Department of Agriculture is announcing an additional $30 million to get more water to livestock and restore land impacted by drought. The National Credit Union Administration is allowing an additional thousand credit unions to increase lending to small businesses. The Department of Transportation is ready to help more commercial truck drivers to provide much-needed supplies to farmers and ranchers. And the SBA, the Small Business Administration, is working with other Government agencies to connect even more eligible farmers, ranchers, and businesses with low-interest emergency loans as well as counseling and workforce programs.

Now, those are the ideas that have already been presented and are in the process of being implemented, but my instructions to all the agencies is, we need to keep working and to see if there is more that we can do. And we're going to continue to solicit ideas from State and local organizations, faith-based organizations, non-for-profit groups, the private sector, and most of all, the farmers and ranchers that are directly impacted to find additional ways that we can help, because when there's a disaster like this, everybody needs to pull together.

Obviously, Congress has a role here. Congress needs to pass a farm bill that will not only provide important disaster relief tools, but also make necessary reforms and give farmers the certainty that they deserve. That's the single best way that we can help rural communities both in the short term, but also in the long term. And we've already seen some good bipartisan work done in the Senate. Now's the time for us to come together and go ahead and get this done. And my hope is, is that Congress, many of whom will be traveling back to their districts, in some cases in rural communities and see what's taking place there, will feel a greater sense of urgency and be prepared to get this done immediately upon their return.

In the meantime, my administration is going to use the full extent of our administrative powers to make sure that we're responding appropriately.

All right? Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:21 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : White House Rural Council meeting.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Vilsack, Thomas J.

Subjects: Agriculture : Crop insurance; Agriculture : Farm financial assistance; Agriculture : Farmers and ranchers, assistance; Agriculture : Legislation; Agriculture, Department of : Disaster assistance funding; Agriculture, Department of : Secretary; Business and industry : Banks and financial institutions :: Loans to small businesses, increase; Congress : Bipartisanship; Environment : Drought relief efforts; White House Office : White House Rural Council.

DCPD Number: DCPD201200626.