



April 7, 2021

The Honorable Jared Huffman
U.S. Representative
1527 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Thompson
U.S. Representative
406 Cannon Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike McGuire
State Senator
1303 10th Street, Room 5061
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Marc Levine
Assemblymember
P.O. Box 942849, Room 5135
Sacramento, CA 94249-0010

The Honorable Jim Wood
Assemblymember
P.O. Box 942849
Sacramento, CA 94249-0002

RE: Aid for California Ag Producers Due to Extreme Drought Conditions

Dear Representatives Huffman, Thompson and Wood; Senator McGuire; and Assembly Member Levine:

The Marin Resource Conservation District (Marin RCD) requests your support to provide state and federal aid for California agricultural producers due to extreme and worsening drought conditions.

California and several other western states are currently experiencing extreme drought conditions that will continue to worsen throughout the 2021 season. Many ranchers are comparing the current conditions to the [1976-1977 California drought](#), which was the worst drought in the California history.

The Marin RCD is currently working with State and Federal agencies to postpone important greenhouse gas reduction, carbon farming and riparian restoration projects on ranches and dairies due to lack of spring, well and pond water available to sustain these practices. The district is also developing drought contingency plans for existing projects.

Respectfully, we request the following:

1. There is an immediate need to support agricultural producers to source, purchase, and transport water now and throughout 2021. Multiple regional water sources should be considered.

2. There is an immediate need to support agricultural producers with the purchase of feed now and throughout 2021, especially organic feed. Most organic dairies rely on their own certified organic pastures as the primary feed for their cattle, but the lack of water has meant far less grass on the ground and the need to import feed from elsewhere at extremely high cost.
3. There is a long-term funding need for improved water capture, storage, and supply systems for all agricultural producers to help ensure drought resiliency in the future, including incorporating new technology to better assess existing drought conditions. Much of the long-term structural needs should be provided through programs sponsored by USDA Farm Service Agency, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Resource Conservation Districts, but the potential scale of need is overly concerning and requires additional support. Environmental review and permitting support will be essential and will require cooperation from agencies like the State Water Resources Control Board and US Army Corps of Engineers to facilitate water development projects.

In Marin and Sonoma Counties, the situation is grim and is progressively deteriorating. To date the area has only received 41% of average rainfall. Many other parts of California are experiencing similar conditions or will be in coming months. A state-wide approach to support the ranching industry, especially dairies, will be most impactful and provide the greatest opportunity for needed state and federal aid.

To provide context for this drought's current severity, several Marin and Sonoma County dairies have been importing water by truck since the fall of 2020 just to keep their animals alive. More dairies will be forced to do the same in coming months. Livestock ranches are selling cattle. Without adequate state and federal aid, there is great concern about the viability of many of these dairies and cattle ranches, and the dairy industry overall. Also, in our region fresh vegetable production in 2021 could be cut by half due to lack of water.

Additionally, many reservoir levels are already very low due to the 2020 drought. Locally, most public reservoir levels in Marin and Sonoma Counties are approximately 50% overall, with Lake Sonoma at 40% capacity. As of April 5, 2021, Shasta was at 53%, Trinity Lake 53%, Oroville 41%, Folsom 37%, Millerton 34%, San Luis 54%, Don Pedro 70%. These numbers are extremely concerning as they speak to the overall lack of available water that will last through the entirety of 2021. Local agricultural producers in Marin and Sonoma Counties have described their surface water storage capacities as being 10-40% of expected volumes. See [Department of Water Resources - California Daily Reservoir Storage Summary](#) for additional detail.

Lessons learned from the 1976 and 1977 drought

In the 1978 report titled, [1976-1977 California Drought – A Review](#), the following cautionary statements were made under the section titled, “The Lessons Learned” (page 174 on report, or page 188 of the pdf):

- *“Drought has often been referred to as “a creeping phenomenon”, and this characteristic was partly responsible for the delay of the Federal Government in providing assistance. Because the Federal Government was initially slow to mobilize, what might have become “mitigation” measures actually became relief efforts. More effective drought contingency planning and sound management practices can reduce those drought costs incurred as a result of relief.”*

- *“Short-term federal mitigative efforts were criticized for being slow to respond, initially inflexible, and lacking communication with the public (again initially). There is a need for improving State and federal “trigger mechanisms” for mobilizing short-term mitigative activities.”*

Accordingly, drought relief programs, feed purchases, long-term low interest credit, and tax relief programs should all be part of a solution now to help mitigate the drought conditions before they worsen. There is very real potential this drought will rank among the worst in California history. We respectfully urge that we begin to plan for the worst-case scenario and prepare to provide support to agricultural producers.

Our food system is the life blood of our society. Our agricultural producers provide critical commodities, value-added products, and ecosystem services to the region. As livestock herds are reduced due to drought, the ability to effectively manage invasive species and wildfire fuel loads on rangeland is hampered and increases the risk of deadly wildfires. We have a responsibility to ensure our producers receive the support needed to stay viable and continue providing local and regional products to our communities.

We urge state and federal government to collaborate with California’s counties in the form of mitigation and relief funds as soon as possible. Thank you for your prompt attention to this pressing and deteriorating issue.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:
Nancy Scolari
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Nancy Scolari

Executive Director