

## NEWS RELEASE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

### Dept. of Environmental Protection

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Beaver, Fayette, Greene and Washington Counties Included in Federal Drought Disaster Declaration**

HARRISBURG, Pa., Aug. 2-- On behalf of Gov. Tom Ridge, Agriculture Secretary Samuel E. Hayes Jr. today welcomed federal actions designating Beaver, Fayette, Greene and Washington counties as disaster areas because of excessive heat and drought.

"Farmers across the Commonwealth are suffering the effects of one of the worst droughts in recent memory," Hayes said. "This designation by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) opens the door for getting badly needed assistance to some of our drought-stricken growers."

The four Pennsylvania counties became eligible for federal disaster assistance after the USDA declared the entire state of West Virginia as a disaster area. As a result, farmers in the contiguous Pennsylvania counties are now eligible for assistance through low-interest loans for crop damage and losses from the drought.

Meanwhile, representatives of local USDA agencies continue to conduct damage assessments of county crop losses across Pennsylvania. If conditions warrant, Gov. Ridge will make a formal request to USDA for additional disaster declarations in Pennsylvania.

To be eligible for federal disaster assistance, farmers must have realized at least a 30 percent loss for a single crop; be able to repay the loan and other loans; be unable to receive credit from another source and have an adequate credit history.

Farmers in the designated areas have eight months from the date of loss to apply for loans to help cover losses.

Other forms of assistance available to drought stricken farmers from USDA includes:

- Emergency Conservation Program, which offers emergency funding on a cost-share basis for farmers to implement water conservation measures;
- Federal crop insurance; and
- Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program, which provides compensation for crops not eligible for crop insurance.

Gov. Ridge signed a drought emergency declaration on July 20 for 55 Pennsylvania counties. A drought emergency imposes mandatory restrictions on non-essential water use. However, those restrictions do not apply to agricultural irrigation for the production of food and fiber and the maintenance of livestock and poultry.

For more information about the drought, visit the Department of Environmental Protection through the Pennsylvania website at <http://www.state.pa.us>, or directly at <http://www.dep.state.pa.us> (choose Drought Emergency.)

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Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture Web Site: <http://www.dep.state.pa.us>