

CORY GARDNER
4TH DISTRICT, COLORADO

ENERGY AND COMMERCE COMMITTEE
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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0604

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The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

Many counties throughout Colorado are experiencing drought conditions. Due to below-average snowpack from the winter, and little precipitation this past spring, our counties are in need of assistance. I write today to urge you to consider issuing a drought declaration for the affected counties in Colorado.

In 2002, Colorado experienced one of the worst droughts on record and this year precipitation levels and water availability are strikingly similar. Currently, the South Platte River Basin which provides water to both municipal and agricultural water users is 70 percent of average from previous year's data. The below-average water levels are raising serious concerns for Colorado agriculture, local businesses and county and municipal governments. In 2002, the United States Department of Agriculture issued a disaster declaration for drought in Colorado, and with similar conditions this year, it is important your agency consider doing the same.

This is a statewide situation and all counties, municipal governments, and agriculture will be subjected to water use restrictions. Our county governments are already moving ahead by issuing drought declarations, yet these declarations will not produce the federal assistance they desperately need. Allowing Colorado to experience another 2002 drought without assistance is simply unacceptable.

To support Coloradans, alleviating the hardship of drought will take a coordinated statewide and federal effort. One county is particular, Weld County, has petitioned the Governor of Colorado to take emergency action by allowing well-pumped ground water to be used temporarily in the assistance of farmers whose fields and crops are drying-up. I fully support Weld County's request to the Governor, and it is important that all Colorado counties are given the same assistance in order to protect farmers and ranchers.

Mr. Secretary, I urge you to consider issuing a disaster declaration for drought in Colorado. We are entering an urgent situation and I appreciate your immediate attention to this matter. I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Cory Gardner
Member of Congress (CO-4)