

Branstad, Reynolds pledge continued efforts in addressing the drought's impact in Iowa

DES MOINES – Gov. Terry Branstad and Lt. Gov. Kim Reynolds used their weekly press conference this morning to highlight the state's ongoing efforts to address the impact of this summer's drought in Iowa.

The most recent USDA drought monitor shows that almost 75 percent of Iowa is now in the "D-2" severe drought stage and roughly 25 percent in the "D-3" extreme drought stage. At the time of the governor and lieutenant governor's drought summit in Mt. Pleasant less than two weeks ago, just 12 percent of Iowa's land was considered in a D-2 severe drought stage.

Joining them at the news conference was Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey, Department of Natural Resources Director Chuck Gipp, Department of Transportation Director Paul Trombino, and Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management Division Administrator Mark Schouten.

Branstad and Reynolds will continue their efforts, and wanted to ensure Iowans were aware of the following measures that have been taken thus far:

- Two weeks ago, the governor sent a letter to USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack informing him of the worsening conditions in Iowa, where he requested the secretary to declare Secretarial Disaster designations for Iowa counties as soon as they qualify. Also in the letter, the governor asked the Secretary to open up CRP lands as soon as federal guidelines allow. Just recently the Secretary announced the USDA will open CRP lands for emergency grazing in 26 counties in Iowa and that CRP lands will be open for the rest of Iowa counties as soon as Aug. 2 for haying and grazing.
- Last week, state-owned land managed by the DNR was opened for our farmers and producers for emergency grazing and haying. Having access to additional 6,000 acres is something that should provide immediate relief to those who are being impacted by these conditions.
- Another item of significant concern was the need to relax certain rules and regulations that would hinder swift relief for those who need it the most. There is an increasing demand for access to hay, straw and stover for our livestock producers. As a result, the governor approved a proclamation that temporarily waives certain weight and width and hours of service requirements for those transporting hay, straw and stover.
- The state opened up DOT roadside ditches as another avenue for our farmers to bail hay. Through this program, farmers can obtain a DOT permit to bail roadside ditches as an economical and efficient way for producers to obtain hay for their livestock.
- The Beginning Farmer Loan Program, through the Iowa Agricultural Development Authority, allows all farmers to obtain low-interest loans to assist them with costs for eligible projects.

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Despite its name, the program eligibility is not based on the age of the farmer, but rather, the net worth of the applicant.

- Administration staff, along with key state agency staff members, will hold weekly conference calls with leadership of Iowa farmer and producer associations. The purpose of these calls is to ensure that the concerns and questions of our impacted farmers and producers are being heard and addressed.
- The administration has launched a new page on its website to act as a one-stop-shop on all drought-related items and news from state government: <http://governor.iowa.gov/drought>

“We want to assure Iowans that every effort will be taken on their behalf with regard to this drought,” said Gov. Branstad. “We will work with federal partners, state agencies and departments, and all Iowans as we combat the effects of this drought. This is a top priority of my administration.”

The lieutenant governor noted that the administration is taking a proactive strategy with regard to the drought.

“Our administration firmly believes that the best way to attack any potential disaster is through a proactive strategy,” said Reynolds. “We will continue to engage every department and agency that has a role to play in these efforts.”

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