

EFFECTIVE DROUGHT RELIEF

BACKGROUND

A searing drought has embraced all or parts of every state that is a member of the Southern Legislative Conference. Available data indicate that this is the worst drought since 1936 with losses ranging to several billion dollars. The crop loss in some areas of the South may reach 50 percent for some crops, and could approach 25 percent for most of the region. Southern farmers have sustained difficult growing conditions for the last six years in which they have experienced three droughts in parts of the region; and economic conditions of the last three or four years have left Southern farmers heavily in debt. As a result, many Southern farmers are on the brink of bankruptcy.

It is the policy of the Southern Legislative Conference that an effective and comprehensive drought relief program be implemented by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and other relevant federal agencies coordinated by a special office in the White House. Clearly, it is the responsibility and duty of the federal government to protect its citizens from the economic devastation associated with severe natural disasters. This drought, the worse to effect the nation since 1936, has been especially tragic for the south because of the small farm size and the importance of agriculture to the livelihood of people in the region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Southern Legislative Conference urges prompt action from the following federal institutions:

CONGRESS

1. Passage of Senate Resolution 220 "Relating to Emergency Assistance to Farmers and Others Adversely Affected by the Drought" which has been offered by Senator Walter D. Huddleston (D-KY) and Senator Mark Andrews (R-ND) and other senators. The resolution calls for Presidential disaster declarations and for the eight-point program to address problems caused by and associated with the drought.
2. Congressional hearings by the House and Senate Agriculture Committees on the federal government's response to the drought, including: (1) effectiveness of disaster designation procedures utilized by the Farmers Home Administration; (2) effectiveness of the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation program; and (3) effectiveness of other disaster-related programs to crop farmers and livestock producers and those small businesses and cooperatives who serve agricultural producers. Such hearings should also consider the effectiveness of drought-related programs by the Small Business Administration.