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### **California Ag Groups Join Together for Disaster Assistance Letter**

Last Friday, CAFB and several other ag organizations joined together for a Congressional letter requesting further assistance on disasters experienced across the state for 2023. With data collection spearheaded by our Federal Policy team's Erin Huston, we've estimated around \$2.4 billion in agricultural losses because of various storms and drought. This includes the atmospheric rivers, flooding, Hurricane Hilary, and other storms.

From issues with adjusted gross income (AGI) thresholds and the Environmental Conservation Program (ECP), to dairy feed assistance and Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) challenges, the letter was intended to hit on several challenges our producers have experienced both directly and indirectly as a result of these weather events. With Congress currently looking at several funding bills in the coming weeks and months, we're hopeful that our coalition can help carve out enough disaster support for the agricultural industry. We will continue to update members as this progresses.

### **ERP Funding for 2022 Announced**

The USDA will provide over \$3 billion in aid to crop producers affected by natural disasters in 2022 through the Emergency Relief Program (ERP). The program aims to offset financial losses resulting from crop yield and value reductions due to qualifying disasters in 2022. It comes as a response to the repeated weather-related challenges faced by farmers. ERP 2022 consists of two tracks: Track 1 uses existing crop insurance or Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance (NAP) data to calculate payments for eligible crop producers while Track 2 is a revenue-based certification program designed for those with revenue losses from 2022 disasters. Producers can apply for one or both tracks, but duplication of benefits is avoided.

The USDA encourages producers to apply for ERP 2022, with benefits estimated to reach a substantial number of eligible recipients. Producers must also have the required forms on file with FSA. Additionally, those receiving ERP 2022 payments must purchase crop insurance or NAP coverage in the next two available crop years. For more information and eligibility details, producers can refer to the emergency relief website or their local FSA county office.

[USDA Release](#)

### **President Embarks on "Rural Tour"**

This week, President Joe Biden kicked off what he's dubbed as a "Rural Tour" across America, which is expected to take him to over a dozen states in a two-week period. With a kick off event in Minnesota farm country, the President announced an additional \$5 billion in new funds being funneled from the Bipartisan

Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act towards programs benefiting rural America. This includes everything from broadband access to clean drinking water. Some of the specific programs include the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the Conservation Stewardship Program, and others.

The President is also dispatching several of his Cabinet members and undersecretaries around the country as well. From a political perspective, it has been seen as a way to help shore up support in regions where Democrats have underperformed in recent election cycles. Given the extra boost of funding being diverted through USDA though, many of these programs will certainly benefit from the extra attention. While a full schedule has not been announced, we will certainly keep an eye on whether the President or his Secretaries plan to include the country's largest ag-producing state.

### [USDA Release](#)

#### **CAFB Submits Comments on Chumash National Marine Sanctuary Proposed Rule**

The California Farm Bureau recently submitted comments regarding the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) proposed Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary (CHNMS). NOAA is considering the designation of the CHNMS in central California's coastal waters, which includes areas in San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara Counties. With such a significant agricultural presence in these counties, there are concerns about how this designation could potentially impact routine agricultural activities and potentially introduce new regulations.

Key Points from our Comments include:

1. The proposal includes a "Prohibition on Discharges" section, which has raised potential regulations on agricultural activities that might be miles away from the proposed CHNMS boundary. The vague language regarding what constitutes harm to the sanctuary resource or quality adds uncertainty to soil tilling, pest control, grazing, and crop irrigation. We request that NOAA provide considerations and exemptions for agriculture.
2. We urged NOAA to avoid creating additional and unnecessary permits and take a non-regulatory approach as farmers and ranchers already face stringent water quality regulations via the Central Coast Regional Water Board's Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program.
3. The economic cost benefit analysis in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) lacks sufficient discussion of the impact on farming and ranching in these counties. We believe the analysis should consider its effects on employment and local communities dependent on agriculture.

### [Chumash Sanctuary Comment Letter](#)

#### **USDA Publishes New Standards for Organic Livestock and Poultry Production**

Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack announced the introduction of the final rule for the Organic Livestock and Poultry Standards (OLPS) which aims to establish consistent standards for organic livestock and poultry production. This initiative aims to create a more level playing field for organic farmers, ranchers and businesses, while enhancing transparency for consumers. The rule is a response to strong interest from consumers and the organic industry, with over 40,000 public comments considered during the development.

It includes specific requirements for outdoor space, indoor, and outdoor living conditions, poultry stocking densities, preventative health care, physical alterations, and transportation, handling and slaughter. These standards aim to promote the well-being of animals and align with consumer expectations for organic products. Additionally, the USDA has previewed the Strengthening Organic Enforcement (SOE) final rule, a significant update to organic regulations aimed at increasing oversight and enforcement authority to strengthen consumer and farmer confidence in organic products.

[USDA Release](#)

### **\$1.77 Billion Distributed for Climate-Smart Ag**

Following on the President's tour announcement, the USDA followed up with more details on the nearly \$1.8 billion in payments American producers have received through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The voluntary program now covers around 23 million acres of private land. CRP is divided into several subcategories for those looking to enroll. Next year's enrollment should likely begin sometime in the Spring (we will update members when this happens). For learning more about what these programs entail, click [here](#).