

USDA allocates \$21 million to help farmers, ranchers battle drought

By Matt Stevens

A branch of the U.S. Department of Agriculture will provide \$21 million to help farmers and ranchers in California and other states install new irrigation systems, plant cover crops and implement other water conservation practices, officials said Monday.

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The funds, made possible by the 2014 farm bill, will be distributed to the most severely drought-stricken areas of eight states, as determined by the U.S. Drought Monitor.

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Caption Could Israeli desalination be model for California?

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It is not clear how much of the money will go to California, but in a call with reporters, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said the state has already received more than \$27 million from the Natural Resources Conservation Service for drought management practices this fiscal year.

Between 2012 and 2014, the service spent more than \$1.5 billion to help farmers implement conservation practices, officials said.

The latest funding is meant to help farmers and ranchers launch projects that can increase irrigation efficiency, improve soil health and productivity and ensure reliable water sources for livestock, officials said.

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“We’re very anxious to get this money deployed and out this summer,” said Natural Resources Conservation Service chief Jason Weller.

The \$21 million, which will be shared by parts of California, Kansas, Idaho, Nevada, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas and Utah, is a fraction of the state money proposed by Gov. Jerry Brown in his [May budget revision](#). Brown called for \$75 million for financial incentives to get farmers to invest in more efficient irrigation techniques.

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