

**By U.S. Secretary of Agriculture TOM VILSACK**

After spending much of August out of Washington, Congress is back – and rural America is watching closely, hoping for passage of a Food, Farm and Jobs Bill as soon as possible.

With farmers facing the worst drought in decades this summer and the current Farm Bill set to expire on Sept. 30 of this year, time is running out for Congress to act.

You and I both know the stakes couldn't be higher.

Since early this summer, when the Senate passed a comprehensive, multi-year Food Farm and Jobs Act, the Administration has expressed its preference for such comprehensive legislation and urged Congress to act before the current law expires.

Let me tell you why:

A comprehensive, multiyear Food, Farm and Jobs Bill would ensure a strong safety net for our producers. This includes disaster assistance for those who have been impacted by the drought – especially by providing help for livestock and specialty crop producers and providing a new support system for dairy producers.

Just as important, a new multiyear bill would ensure certainty for all farmers and ranchers in the coming years.

It would help USDA to continue growing agricultural trade. We're in the four best years for agricultural exports in our history, and we can't afford to stop now.

It would enable USDA to continue the record investments we've made since 2009 in America's small towns and rural communities. USDA could continue to modernize water and electric utilities for millions of Americans, expand broadband access, and help rural businesses grow. And it would give us tools to continue expanding the production of advanced biofuels and biobased manufacturing, creating more good jobs that can't be shipped overseas.

It would allow USDA to continue the groundbreaking agricultural research that's ongoing today, both here and at universities across America – important research the likes of which helps agriculture through tough times such as the current drought.

A Food, Farm and Jobs Bill would enhance USDA conservation efforts, ensuring that vital conservation programs that enable rural Americans to protect the land and water don't expire.

It would enable USDA to continue helping millions of American families – folks who are working hard, playing by the rules, but still having trouble making ends meet – to provide food for their children.

And if Congress acts, we'll be able to continue our efforts to ensure the safest food supply on earth.

As America recovers from economic recession, rural Americans are leading the way and USDA is supporting their efforts. It's not time to let up now, and that's why we need Congress to pass a Food, Farm and Jobs Bill as soon as possible.