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July 30, 2014

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

I write to respectfully request the immediate assistance of the U.S. Department of Agriculture for agricultural producers in my district, Puerto Rico, who are suffering losses as a result of prolonged drought conditions. The latest information available from the U.S. Drought Monitor—which the Department uses as a barometer to measure drought severity across the entire United States—indicates that 49 of Puerto Rico's 78 municipalities are experiencing abnormally dry conditions and that 13 municipalities are experiencing moderate drought conditions classified at the D1 level of drought intensity on the monitor scale. These official indicators reinforce the personal stories I have heard from my constituents about the effects of the drought. I observed firsthand drought losses and low crop yields this past weekend.

I am aware that the impact of prolonged drought is being felt in the U.S. mainland as well, and that the Department is responding by helping farmers and ranchers in affected communities in the states through the various programs that Congress has authorized for such purposes. I am encouraged that the Department is utilizing the disaster declaration process that it streamlined in 2012 and the enacted 2014 Farm Bill disaster programs to respond to the current drought situation affecting producers in the states. I believe this national response needs to be extended to Puerto Rico immediately, and I respectfully request your personal intervention to ensure appropriate assistance is made available, and that due consideration is given for an agricultural disaster declaration covering the areas in Puerto Rico that have been most adversely affected.

Apart from a possible disaster declaration, which I understand has been made to date for approximately 1,700 counties spanning 20 states as a result of drought conditions, it is imperative that the Farm Service Agency (FSA) State Office in Puerto Rico be given all of the resources necessary to respond on a timely basis to claims for losses experienced by drought-affected farmers and ranchers in the territory. Puerto Rico has a low rate of participation in the federal crop insurance program, which makes full and expedited implementation of the various authorized disaster assistance programs by the FSA all the more critical for Puerto Rico's agricultural producers. These programs include the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP), the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honey Bees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP), and the Tree Assistance Program (TAP).

I thank you for your attention to this pressing matter and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Pedro R. Pierluisi
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Alejandro García-Padilla, Governor of Puerto Rico
Mr. Juan Garcia, Administrator, U.S. Farm Service Agency
Mr. Juan M. Ortiz Serbiá, State Executive Director, U.S. Farm Service Agency