



The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Joseph Manchin
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate
306 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington D.C. 20510

July 29, 2022

Dear Leader Schumer and Chairman Manchin:

Many regions in the Western United States are currently facing the worst drought in the last 1,200 years, a crisis that was the topic of a critically important committee hearing conducted by Chairman Manchin last month. The result of this drought is starkly apparent in the millions of acres of unplanted farmland, depleted reservoirs, and water restrictions for millions of Western homes and businesses.

As Congress prepares to consider the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, which aims to address climate change and inflation, we write to express our surprise and concern about the absence of meaningful provisions to address water security and emergency drought response. There is a clear and undebatable link between reduced water availability, escalating food prices and shortages, and the climate crises. Failing to address these critically important water challenges in any reconciliation package or other legislative vehicle will be a missed opportunity, and in a year where the impacts of drought are being so acutely felt, citizens across the West would view this as a glaring omission.

We appreciate the investments Congress provided for water infrastructure in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act last year, which will improve the management of Western water resources in years to come. However, the impact and urgency of this ongoing drought demands an immediate response and will require billions of dollars if we hope to stave off the most severe impacts to Western communities and economies and an erosion of our nation's long-term capacity to produce food and fiber. This assistance is desperately needed to allow for voluntary, temporary, compensated reductions in water use, support to mitigate environmental and community impacts, offset reductions in carbon-free hydropower generation, and other emergency conservation and water management and efficiency activities.

We are not alone in recognizing these threats.

Last month, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack acknowledged that “[i]ntense drought and climate change continue to threaten major economic drivers in rural communities, disrupt food systems and water supplies, endanger public health, jeopardize the integrity of critical infrastructure, and exacerbate wildfires and floods.”



Likewise, Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Camille Touton said before Chairman Manchin’s Committee last month that the Colorado River - which provides water to 40 million people, 5.5 million acres of farmland that produces 90% of our nation’s winter vegetables, and generates clean power that the Southwest’s economy is built upon– is at a “tipping point”. At that hearing – which generated national media coverage – she called on water users to cut 2-4 million acre-feet of water use in order to “protect the system.”

This drought has national implications and needs a strong federal response. Each day that goes by without Congressional action on drought exacerbates the impact and further threatens the water security of over 100 million Westerners. The overall reconciliation proposal being considered will impact our members in different ways and our positions on the legislation vary. Nevertheless, if a reconciliation package is considered- we strongly urge you to include provisions to provide immediate drought relief to the Western United States.

We make this request on behalf of Western farmers, ranchers, water providers, businesses and communities who help provide \$120 billion of agricultural production on millions of acres of productive land. We also represent many of the local and regional public water agencies that supply water to over 75 million Western urban, suburban and rural residents. Access to a safe, reliable, and affordable supply of water is of critical importance to the health and wellbeing of our nation’s citizens and is also vital to the health of our nation’s economy.

Thank you for considering our request. We appreciate your leadership.

Sincerely,
Agribusiness and Water Council of Arizona

Arizona Farm Bureau Federation

Association of California Water Agencies

California Farm Bureau

Colorado Farm Bureau

Family Farm Alliance

National Water Resources Association

Oregon Farm Bureau

Western Growers

Cc:

Hon. Michael Bennet
Hon. Maria Cantwell
Hon. Catherine Cortez Masto
Hon. Diane Feinstein
Hon. Martin Heinrich
Hon. John Hickenlooper

Hon. Mark Kelly
Hon. Ben Ray Lujan
Hon. Jeff Merkley
Hon. Patty Murray
Hon. Alex Padilla
Hon. Jacky Rosen