

## NEWS RELEASE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **GOV. RIDGE LIFTS DROUGHT EMERGENCY IN SOMERSET COUNTY**

*Agricultural emergency remains in place for all 67 counties*

**HARRISBURG (Dec. 16)** – Gov. Tom Ridge today lifted drought-emergency water-use restrictions for Somerset County, the last remaining county under mandatory water-use restrictions.

"It was necessary to keep Somerset County in a drought emergency because of water rationing in the county," Gov. Ridge said. "Since there has been significant improvement in the county, and there is no longer a need for water rationing, I have lifted the drought restrictions

"However, it's important for all Pennsylvanians to remember the 'conservation habit,' as we still need significant rainfall over a longer period of time to completely recover from the drought."

According to the Department of Environmental Protection, 39 counties remain under a drought watch, and 27 are under a drought warning. Somerset County now will be placed under a drought warning.

A drought watch is the first and least severe of the three drought declarations under the state's drought-operating plan. It calls for a voluntary 5 percent reduction of non-essential water use. A drought warning, the second stage of the three drought declarations, calls for a 10 percent voluntary reduction in water consumption, and a drought emergency, the third and most severe stage, imposes mandatory restrictions on water use.

The agricultural emergency declared by Gov. Ridge on Sept. 9 remains in effect.

"It is essential to the very fabric of Pennsylvania to support our farmers who have lost more than \$700 million as a result of this devastating drought," Gov. Ridge said. "This emergency declaration helps get hay to farmers who desperately need help."

On Dec. 13, Gov. Ridge signed into law the largest state aid package for drought-stricken farmers in the nation this year.

The law makes available \$82.6 million in state funds: \$60 million in grants for eligible farmers; \$5.6 million to subsidize crop insurance costs for farmers; \$2 million to reimburse commercial orchard and fruit-tree nursery owners for losses from the Plum Pox Virus; and \$15 million for flood relief.

The \$60 million in state aid adds to the \$75 million in federal funds for Pennsylvania crop disaster relief. To be eligible for state aid, farmers must have applied and been approved for federal disaster relief. The state will

match up to 75 percent of the federal grant each farmer receives. The remaining \$5.6 million in state farm aid will help defray up to 10 percent of the cost of crop insurance premiums and fees.

The latest drought information, including precipitation tables and water-conservation tips, is available on the Pennsylvania homepage at [www.state.pa.us](http://www.state.pa.us) or directly on DEP's website at [www.dep.state.pa.us](http://www.dep.state.pa.us) (directLINK "Drought").

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