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(Original Signature of Member)

119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. _____

To amend the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 to extend the program providing for improvements to the United States Drought Monitor.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. TAYLOR introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on _____

A BILL

To amend the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 to extend the program providing for improvements to the United States Drought Monitor.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Improving Drought
5 Monitoring Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. IMPROVEMENTS TO UNITED STATES DROUGHT**
2 **MONITOR.**

3 Section 12512(d)(2) of the Agriculture Improvement
4 Act of 2018 (7 U.S.C. 5856(d)(2)) is amended by striking
5 “2023” and inserting “2030”.

6 **SEC. 3. DROUGHT MONITOR INTERAGENCY WORKING**
7 **GROUP.**

8 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the
9 date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Agriculture
10 shall establish an interagency working group (referred to
11 in this section as the “working group”) to improve the
12 availability of consistent, accurate, and reliable data for
13 use in producing the United States Drought Monitor in
14 accordance with section 12512 of the Agriculture Improve-
15 ment Act of 2018 (7 U.S.C. 5856).

16 (b) MEMBERSHIP.—The working group shall consist
17 of not fewer than—

18 (1) 3 representatives from the Department of
19 Agriculture, including 1 representative from each
20 of—

21 (A) the Office of the Chief Economist, who
22 shall serve as the Chair of the working group;

23 (B) the Forest Service; and

24 (C) the Farm Service Agency;

1 (2) 4 representatives from the National Oceanic
2 and Atmospheric Administration, including 1 rep-
3 resentative from each of—

4 (A) the Climate Prediction Center;

5 (B) the National Centers for Environ-
6 mental Information;

7 (C) the National Integrated Drought In-
8 formation System; and

9 (D) the National Mesonet Program;

10 (3) 1 representative from the National Drought
11 Mitigation Center;

12 (4) 1 representative from the Department of
13 the Interior;

14 (5) 1 representative from the Cooperative Insti-
15 tute for Research to Operations in Hydrology of the
16 University of Alabama; and

17 (6) 3 representatives from mesonet programs in
18 States—

19 (A) that have experienced severe drought,
20 as determined by the United States Drought
21 Monitor, in not less than 5 calendar years dur-
22 ing the period of calendar years 2012 through
23 2023; and

24 (B) more than 50 percent of the land area
25 of which is designated by the Economic Re-

1 search Service as a Level 1 frontier and remote
2 area.

3 (c) DUTIES.—The working group shall—

4 (1) develop a means for the inclusion of addi-
5 tional in-situ data into the process of developing the
6 United States Drought Monitor, including—

7 (A) determining minimum requirements
8 for data to be included in the United States
9 Drought Monitor;

10 (B) identifying data available from other
11 government agencies, including through portals
12 managed by the National Oceanic and Atmos-
13 pheric Administration; and

14 (C) identifying gaps in coverage and deter-
15 mining solutions to address those gaps;

16 (2) identify and address potential barriers to
17 the use of existing data, including—

18 (A) identifying Federal datasets that would
19 be of immediate use in developing the United
20 States Drought Monitor where access is re-
21 stricted to some or all authors of the United
22 States Drought Monitor; and

23 (B) developing proposed accommodations,
24 modifications to contractual agreements, or up-
25 dates to interagency memoranda of under-

1 standing to allow for incorporation of datasets
2 identified under subparagraph (A);

3 (3) develop an open and transparent method-
4 ology for vetting data products developed using re-
5 mote sensing or modeling;

6 (4) if determined appropriate by the working
7 group, develop a methodology for inclusion of data
8 that may otherwise be excluded from the United
9 States Drought Monitor due to shorter periods of
10 record; and

11 (5) identify and address any other issues relat-
12 ing to data availability and quality, as determined
13 appropriate by the Chair of the working group.

14 (d) REPORT.—Not later than 1 year after the date
15 of enactment of this Act, the working group shall submit
16 a report containing recommendations for changes in poli-
17 cies, regulations, guidance documents, or existing law to
18 meet the objectives described in subsection (c) to—

19 (1) the Secretary of Agriculture;

20 (2) the Secretary of Commerce;

21 (3) the Secretary of the Interior;

22 (4) the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition,
23 and Forestry of the Senate;

24 (5) the Committee on Commerce, Science, and
25 Transportation of the Senate;

1 (6) the Committee on Agriculture of the House
2 of Representatives; and

3 (7) the Committee on Science, Space, and
4 Technology of the House of Representatives.

5 (e) ACTION BY SECRETARY.—Not later than 180
6 days after the date of submission of the report under sub-
7 section (d), the Secretary of Agriculture, in coordination
8 with the Secretary of Commerce and the Secretary of the
9 Interior, shall incorporate, to the extent practicable, the
10 recommendations of the working group to improve the
11 United States Drought Monitor in accordance with section
12 12512 of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (7
13 U.S.C. 5856).

14 (f) TERMINATION.—The working group shall termi-
15 nate on the date that is 90 days after the date on which
16 the report is submitted under subsection (d).

17 **SEC. 4. ALIGNMENT OF FARM SERVICE AGENCY AND FOR-**
18 **EST SERVICE DROUGHT RESPONSE.**

19 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 60 days after the
20 date of submission of the report under section 3(d), the
21 Administrator of the Farm Service Agency and the Chief
22 of the Forest Service shall enter into a memorandum of
23 understanding to better align drought response activities
24 of the Farm Service Agency and the Forest Service (re-
25 ferred to in this section as the “agencies”).

1 (b) CONTENTS.—The memorandum of understanding
2 entered into under subsection (a) shall include—

3 (1) a commitment to better align practices of
4 the agencies with respect to determining the severity
5 of regional drought conditions;

6 (2) a strategy for amending those determina-
7 tions to ensure consistent policy with respect to
8 drought response in cases where the agencies are
9 making inconsistent determinations within the same
10 spatial scale;

11 (3) an agreement to utilize, to the extent prac-
12 ticable, the United States Drought Monitor in mak-
13 ing those determinations; and

14 (4) an agreement to provide consistent informa-
15 tion to grazing permittees, operators, and other
16 stakeholders affected by determinations relating to
17 drought.