

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 21, 2026

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Rollins:

I write to urge the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to assign an Emergency Declaration for Puerto Rico, where farmers and agricultural producers are facing severe hardship due to ongoing extreme drought conditions, with potential significant economic losses.

Puerto Rico is currently experiencing severe drought conditions that meet USDA's eligibility thresholds for emergency designation. Fast Track designation requires that municipalities reach D2 (Severe Drought) for eight consecutive weeks, D3 (Extreme Drought), or D4 (Exceptional Drought) for any period of time. According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, the San Germán municipality has been at a D2 level for at least eight consecutive weeks. An additional 28 municipalities, Aibonito, Barranquitas, Cabo Rojo, Caguas, Canóvanas, Carolina, Cayey, Coamo, Guánica, Guayama, Guayanilla, Gurabo, Juana Díaz, Juncos, Lajas, Las Piedras, Naguabo, Orocovi, Peñuelas, Ponce, Río Grande, Sabana Grande, Salinas, San Juan, Santa Isabel, Trujillo Alto, Villalba, and Yauco, have reached a D3 level. In total, 29 municipalities across Puerto Rico currently meet or exceed the criteria for Fast Track designation.

These conditions are placing significant strain on Puerto Rico's agricultural producers, many of whom are already managing the compounding effects of prior natural disasters and aging infrastructure. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS), rainfall deficits are widespread across Puerto Rico, with most regions receiving less than 60 percent of normal precipitation over the past 60 days.¹ Diminishing surface and groundwater levels have triggered water rationing specifically for agricultural users in the south-central and southwest regions, and for residents in parts of the northeast.² The frequency of brush fires has also surged, with more than 300 reports in July alone, and soils continue to dry out, with vegetation stress remaining severe along the southern coast.³ While the current drought's economic toll is still being assessed, past extreme droughts have

¹ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Integrated Drought Information System, *Drought Update for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands* (2026), <https://www.drought.gov/drought-status-updates/drought-update-puerto-rico-and-us-virgin-islands-2026-07-23>.

² National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, *Drought Update for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands*.

³ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, *Drought Update for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands*.

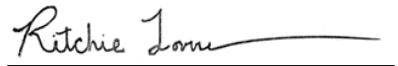
resulted in tens of millions of dollars in losses.⁴ The San Juan National Weather Service reports that affected crops include avocados, breadfruit, coffee, sweet pepper, and coconut.⁵

Puerto Rican farmers and producers are counting on timely federal action. I urge USDA to move expeditiously on an Emergency Declaration for the affected municipalities.

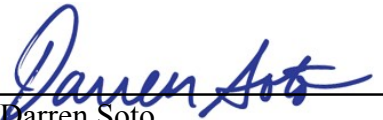
Sincerely,



Pablo José Hernández
Member of Congress



Ritchie Torres
Member of Congress



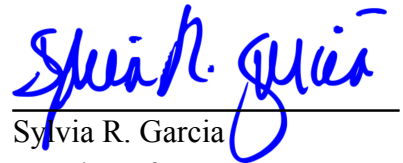
Darren Soto
Member of Congress



Maxwell Alejandro Frost
Member of Congress



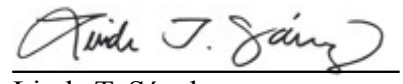
Raul Ruiz, M.D.
Member of Congress



Sylvia R. Garcia
Member of Congress



Robert J. Menendez
Member of Congress



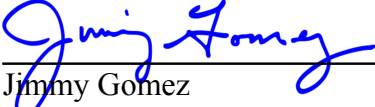
Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress

⁴ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Integrated Drought Information System, *Puerto Rico*, <https://www.drought.gov/states/puerto-rico>.

⁵ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Weather Service, *Drought Information Statement for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands* (2026), https://www.weather.gov/media/sju/DGT/DGT_SJU_08132026.pdf.



Adelita S. Grijalva
Member of Congress



Jimmy Gomez
Member of Congress