

May 20, 2008

H 2345. AGRICULTURAL DROUGHT RESPONSE FUNDS. Filed 5/20/08. *TO APPROPRIATE FUNDS TO ESTABLISH A COST SHARE PROGRAM TO ASSIST NORTH CAROLINA FARMERS WHO SUFFERED DAMAGE FROM THE SEVERE AND EXTREME DROUGHT CONDITIONS IN NORTH CAROLINA IN 2007 AND, IN FURTHER RESPONSE TO THE 2007 DROUGHT, TO APPROPRIATE FUNDS TO THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES TO ASSIST THE GREEN INDUSTRIES AND TO ESTABLISH AND SUPPORT A POSITION TO COORDINATE A STATEWIDE AGRICULTURE RESPONSE TEAM, AS RECOMMENDED BY THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE AGRICULTURAL DROUGHT RESPONSE.*

To be summarized in tomorrow's *Daily Bulletin*.

Intro. by Rapp, Williams.

APPROP

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Establishes the Agricultural Drought Response Cost Share Program (Program) to provide grants to assist North Carolina farmers who suffered damage from the severe drought conditions in the state in 2007. Directs that the grants are to be used to assist farmers with projects to (1) provide a water supply for livestock or irrigation, and (2) renovate pastures depleted by drought.

Directs that the Program be administered by the Division of Soil and Water Conservation (Division) in the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) through the Agriculture Share Programs for Nonpoint Source Pollution Control. Provides that the Division is to administer the Program under the provisions of this section and those in GS Chapter 143, Article 21, Part 9.

Directs that the Division provide grants subject to prescribed limitations and requirements regarding allocation of funding and grant eligibility. Provides that the term of the grant contract is one year but may include an option to extend the contract period to a farmer who needs additional funds to achieve the purpose of the initial grant. Specifies that the requirements and limitations under subdivisions (1), (2), (5), (7), and (8) of subsection (b) of GS 143-215.74 (establishing the Agriculture Share Programs for Nonpoint Source Pollution Control) do not apply.

Requires the Division to establish (1) a process for soliciting and reviewing applications, and (2) criteria for the selection of applicants. Directs the Division to establish criteria to prioritize establishing or re-establishing a water supply for livestock or irrigation and the renovation of pastures depleted by drought. Also requires the Division to provide technical assistance and to facilitate the timely transfer of technology among eligible participants.

Provides that DENR may establish an advisory committee to assist the Division with implementing this act.

Requires the Division to submit by October 1, 2009, and annually thereafter, a comprehensive report on the implementation of the Program to the Environmental Review Commission, as a part of the report required by GS 143-215.10M (regarding required annual reports from DENR).

Establishes the Agricultural Drought Response Account (Account) within DENR. Directs that Account funds be used in accordance with this act. Provides that the Account consist of (1) funds appropriated by the General Assembly, (2) any federal funds available for this purpose, and (3) any grants, gifts, or contributions to the state made for this purpose. Directs that the Account funds cannot revert and requires that 25% of the funds not be allocated during the initial funding cycle and be retained for future use.

Appropriates \$5.25 million for 2008-09 from the General Fund to the Account to implement the Program and specifies how the funds are to be allocated.

Appropriates \$300,000 for 2008-09 from the General Fund to DENR for the Division's cost in implementing the Program.

Appropriates \$1,141,000 for 2008-09 from the General Fund to the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to (1) develop and implement a program to educate consumers on water conservation, (2) develop and implement a campaign to promote water conservation, and (3) establish a position within DENR to develop and coordinate an agricultural emergency response team.

Effective July 1, 2008.

Intro. by Rapp, Williams.

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