

Office Of Rural Community Affairs May Ease Rural Drought Concerns

The Office of Rural Community Affairs (ORCA) announced it has begun working with rural city and county officials to revise existing project contracts to address urgent drought-related water supply concerns.

Local officials are seeking relief through grants they have received from the agency's Texas Community Development Block Grant (Texas CDBG) program, which supports water and wastewater infrastructure

projects in rural Texas.

Officials and agency administrators are looking to revise existing open contracts which were originally funded for the installation and/or repairs of municipal water and wastewater infrastructure to allow for water supply projects instead.

The city of Clarksville is one city that is pursuing revisions to their 2005 \$250,000 Texas CDBG program contract.

Their Texas CDBG grant was originally awarded for the replacement of old, corroded and undersized water lines and the installation of hydrants, reconnections, road bore and related street repairs.

By January 2006, the city was experiencing severe drought conditions with the municipal supply system dangerously low, rendering the city unable to supply sufficient water to meet demand in the near future.

With the agency's determination that Clarksville's Stage 4 drought conditions posed an emergency need and imminent threat to the safety of its residents, their Texas CDBG contract

qualified for possible amendment.

The city council issued a water rationing declaration per the city's "Drought Contingency Plan," and moved quickly to submit a request to ORCA to allow the grant funds be used for a well drilling project.

To date, ORCA administrators note that four other Texas CDBG grant recipients with open contracts with the agency are in the process of amending their contracts with to address water supply concerns.

Amending an open Texas CDBG contract requires the community to meet certain criteria in keeping with federal rules and regulations set forth by the U.S. Department of Housing

and Urban Development, the source of the funds for ORCA's Texas CDBG program.

ORCA's Small Towns Environment Program (STEP), also a Texas CDBG program, offers an alternative to the contract amendment process. The STEP funds provide rural communities with needed dollars for equipment, expertise and technical assistance to address local water and wastewater issues. Local volunteers provide the "sweat equity" (labor) for the STEP projects.

"We understand the difficulties our state's small, rural community and county officials are facing in providing

water to their residents under recent conditions," noted Charles S. (Charlie) Stone, ORCA's Executive Director. "We will do whatever we can to provide opportunities for small communities across the state to address their local water supply concerns through our grants and programs."

ORCA's door is always open for your comments and suggestions regarding the agency, or rural issues in general. Contact ORCA at P.O. Box 12877, Austin, Texas 78711. Phone: 512-936-6701 Toll free: 800-544-2042 E-mail: orca@orca.state.tx.us Fax: 512-936-6776. On the web: www.orca.state.tx.us.

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USDA Ceases Taking New Grassland

GRP funds.

The Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service and Forest Service work together to coordinate implementation of GRP, which helps landowners restore and protect grassland, rangeland, pastureland, shrubland and certain other lands and provides assistance for rehabilitating

grasslands.

Additional information on GRP is available online at www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/GRP or at your local USDA Service Center Office.

Please contact the Colorado County FSA at (979) 732-8306, ext. 2 for additional assistance.

Land preparation was ongoing in other areas. Planting began on a limited basis on the Upper Coast and was expected to start in Central Texas shortly.

In South Texas, some fields have begun to head out while others were baled for hay.

In Central and North Central Texas, fields began to break dormancy and green-up.

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Cotton: Producers on the Plains were busy listing fields and some were

beginning to plant.

Fruit, Vegetable and Specialty Crop Report

In the Rio Grande Valley, harvest of grapefruit and naval oranges continued.

In the San Antonio-Winter Garden, cabbage and spinach harvest continued.

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Sorghum: Planting continued in the Rio Grande Valley and Coastal Bend. Some earlier planted fields were emerging.

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