

BY BOB FORD AND KIM GRIFFIN

Gov. Beverly Perdue this week asked Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson to waive the federally mandated Renewable Fuel Standard. North Carolina's chicken, turkey and pork producers and processors applaud her. This is not a political issue; this is about saving North Carolina jobs, the state's economy and our farms, and keeping food affordable.

A report issued by the U.S. Department of Agriculture last Friday showed that the drought that is decimating the U.S. Corn Belt destroyed a sixth of the country's corn crop in just one month. Yet the RFS mandates that a certain percentage of corn ethanol be blended into gasoline each year – no matter what.

Corn is the No. 1 ingredient in poultry and hog feed, and feed is the single-biggest cost in raising livestock and poultry. With this year's drought, however, there may not be enough corn to go around. Corn prices already have soared to record levels, and livestock and poultry producers are being hit, and hard.

"It is now beyond dispute that our nation is undergoing a severe, prolonged drought that is of historic proportions and is causing widespread damage to many of the most productive agricultural regions in the country," Perdue said in her petition.

The direct harm, she added, was "caused by the RFS requirement to utilize ever-increasing amounts of corn for transportation fuel. Whatever the final damage done by the severe lack of rainfall, it is clear that this harm is reflected in accelerated prices for corn and soybeans, which have a severe economic impact on the state of North Carolina, various regions within the state and important economic sectors within the state."

She is right. The economic effect is happening already here at home. Farmers' livelihoods are being threatened as they are forced to pay record-breaking costs to feed their animals. As the trickle-down effect occurs, soon average North Carolinians will see this price increase at their grocery store. In a tough economic time, our residents do not need to have an even harder time putting food on the table.

In 2007, Congress gave the EPA administrator the authority to waive in part or in whole the RFS requirement for just this situation. Because of the effect the RFS has on the availability of corn in this drought situation, we support Perdue. Among other groups, the National Chicken Council, National Pork Producers Council and National Turkey Federation support the governor's action. A bipartisan group of the North Carolina congressional delegation has also called for the waiver, including Sens. Richard Burr and Kay Hagan.

Poultry and pork are vital parts of North Carolina's economy: Pork production is second in the nation; turkey production is second and broiler chicken production fourth. More than 150,000 jobs in North Carolina either directly or indirectly depend on these industries.

On behalf of North Carolina's poultry and pork producers and processors, we thank Perdue and the 13 members of the North Carolina congressional delegation for stepping up and demanding that the right thing be done for the state.

Bob Ford is executive director of the N.C. Poultry Federation. Kim Griffin is president of the N.C. Pork Council.