

Agricultural Land Drought Management Certification

Jefferson County, Colorado — CSU Extension, in coordination with the Jefferson County Assessor's Office

This form has been developed by CSU Extension in Jefferson County, in coordination with the Jefferson County Assessor's Office, to provide landowners holding agricultural property tax classification with a standardized method for documenting drought-related adjustments to grazing, haying, irrigated cropland, or other agricultural operations for the current tax year. Because the 2026 drought affects Jefferson County and the broader region as a whole, rather than individual parcels in isolation, site-specific verification of each affected property is not practicable. This certification, together with the supporting drought data, statutory basis, and CSU Extension management guidance set out below, is intended to provide the Assessor's Office with consistent documentation to support continued agricultural classification where a landowner has reduced or altered agricultural use in response to drought conditions.

Submit the completed and signed form by mail to Jefferson County Assessor, 100 Jefferson County Parkway, Suite 2500, Golden, CO 80419-2500, or by email to both [Tyler Evans \(tevans@jeffco.us\)](mailto:tevans@jeffco.us) and [Laura Burtsch \(lburtsch@jeffco.us\)](mailto:lburtsch@jeffco.us).

Current Drought Conditions

The following figures are drawn from the U.S. Drought Monitor (a joint product of NOAA, USDA, and the National Drought Mitigation Center), Drought.gov, and the Colorado Department of Agriculture / Colorado Drought Task Force, current as of the 2026 growing season:

- Governor Polis activated Phase 2 of Colorado's Drought Response Plan and the statewide Drought Task Force on March 16, 2026, and activated Phase 3 with a statewide Drought Emergency declaration on June 4, 2026, as conditions worsened ([Colorado Department of Agriculture](#)) .
- As of late June 2026, roughly 93–97% of Colorado land area was in active drought (categories D1–D4), with well over a third of the state in Severe (D2) or worse drought ([U.S. Drought Monitor](#)) .
- Jefferson County recorded its driest January–April period in the past 132 years of record, with precipitation running well below the historical average for that stretch ([Drought.gov, Jefferson County](#)) .
- Low snowpack and below-average stream flows led Denver Water and several municipal providers serving Jefferson County (Arvada, Golden, Lakewood, Wheat Ridge, and others) to implement mandatory Stage 1 drought restrictions in spring 2026 ([Jefferson County, CO](#)) .

Basis in Colorado Agricultural Land Classification Law

Colorado law already anticipates that agricultural land will sometimes need a rest from active production, including because of drought, without losing its agricultural classification:

- [C.R.S. § 39-1-102\(1.6\)\(a\)\(I\)](#) defines “agricultural land” to include land that is “in the process of being restored through conservation practices,” such as land under an approved conservation plan.
- [C.R.S. § 39-1-103\(5\)\(e\)](#) provides that if the productivity of agricultural land is destroyed by a natural cause — which includes drought — the agricultural classification remains in place for the year of the loss and up to four subsequent years, so long as the owner provides evidence of rehabilitating the land's productivity (for example: resting pasture, reseeding, or providing supplemental water for livestock).
- A change in classification cannot occur unless the assessor determines, based on sufficient evidence, that the parcel no longer qualifies as agricultural land under [§ 39-1-102\(1.6\)\(a\)](#) . This certification is intended to serve as part of that evidentiary record.

CSU Extension Recommended Drought Management Practices

Resting pasture, deferring haying, reducing irrigation, or fallowing ground during drought are recognized, research-based agricultural management practices, not an abandonment of agricultural use. CSU Extension guidance relevant to the agricultural uses most common on Jefferson County ag-classified parcels is summarized below by use type.

Grazing / Rangeland & Pasture

- Grazed pasture should be rested until plants regrow to roughly 6–8 inches before animals return; small-acreage pastures generally need a minimum of 21–30 days of rest between grazing periods, and longer under drought stress ([CSU Extension, Managing Small Acreage Pastures During and After Drought](#)) .
- Dryland pastures typically need 30–45 days of regrowth during the fast growth period (May–June) and 60–90 days during the slow growth period (July–October); drought conditions extend these recovery windows further ([CSU Extension, Dryland Pasture Condition Assessment & Guidelines for Colorado Small Acreages](#)) .
- A rotational grazing system with an intensive rest period of 70–120 days between grazing events, or confining livestock to a designated sacrifice area, is recommended to protect range and pasture condition when forage is limited ([CSU Extension, Grazing for Small Acreages](#)) .
- Reducing stocking rate relative to available forage production is the most effective way to limit long-term rangeland damage during drought ([CSU Extension Drought Resources, Livestock & Pasture Management](#)) .

Haying

- Deferring or reducing the number of cuttings taken in a season, and avoiding harvest of drought-stressed grass or alfalfa stands below their recommended residual/stubble height, preserves the crown and root reserves stands need to recover once moisture returns ([CSU Extension, Managing Small Acreage Pastures During and After Drought](#)) .
- Lengthening the interval between cuttings allows drought-stressed hay ground to rebuild energy reserves in the same way rested pasture does; producers commonly test hay forage for nitrate accumulation before feeding when growth has been drought-stressed ([CSU Extension Drought Resources, Livestock & Forage](#)) .

Irrigated Cropland, Orchards & Vineyards

- Where irrigation water is limited, CSU Extension guidance on seasonal crop water needs helps producers plan reduced or deficit irrigation, prioritizing water on the highest-value crops or blocks and accepting that yields will be lower than under full irrigation ([CSU Extension, Seasonal Water Needs and Opportunities for Limited Irrigation for Colorado Crops](#)) .
- Producers may reduce planted acreage, fallow specific fields for the season, or shift to more drought-tolerant varieties as part of standard limited-irrigation planning.
- For orchards, vineyards, and other perennial plantings, prioritizing available water on young or establishment-age plantings and reducing or deferring water to lower-priority blocks is a recognized strategy in limited-water years.

Landowner Certification

I certify that the parcel identified below is enrolled in Jefferson County's agricultural land classification and that, due to 2026 drought conditions, I am implementing one or more of the drought management practices described above in place of normal-year grazing, haying, or other agricultural use.

Landowner name(s)

Parcel / Schedule Number

Phone number

Email address

Property address / legal description

Total parcel acreage

Acres currently enrolled in ag classification

Assessor account / schedule #

Primary agricultural use of this parcel (check all that apply):

Grazing / livestock

Haying

Cropland

Orchard / vineyard

Other:

Drought management practice(s) being implemented (check all that apply):

Resting pasture / extended rest period

Reduced stocking rate

Deferred or reduced haying

Sacrifice area confinement

Rotational grazing adjustment

Deficit / reduced irrigation

Reduced planted acreage / fallowed field(s)

Other:

Practice(s) in effect — start date

Anticipated end date / "until conditions improve"

Additional notes (optional):

Landowner signature

Date

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Questions about this form or drought management practices can be directed to CSU Extension, Jefferson County, Natural Resources Program.