

# The Maryland Farm Bureau Hotline

*Legislative proposals that impact Maryland's farm community*



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## National Update

### **Congressman Kratovil Schedules Round of Meetings with Farmers**

Each year during the month of August, Congress takes a break to allow elected officials to go home to visit with their constituents. Congressman Frank Kratovil (MD-1) is devoting the first full week of the August District Work Period to the farm community. Coordinating with the state and county Farm Bureaus, the Congressman has scheduled town hall-style meetings across the shore to talk with local farmers. The meetings are the perfect opportunity for farmers to convey their concerns about economic conditions on farms, about the potential impact of higher energy costs and to discuss what they want – and don't want – in a health care reform package. Please mark your calendar and plan to attend one of these Farm Town Hall meetings:

#### Monday, August 3rd

10:00am Caroline County  
Gen. James F. Fretterd Community Center,  
107 South Fourth St., Room #104  
Denton, MD 21629

1:00pm Talbot County  
Talbot County Ag Center  
28577 Mary's Court  
Easton, MD

#### Tuesday, August 4<sup>th</sup>

10:00am Worcester & Somerset Counties  
Snow Hill Elem School  
515 Coulbourne Lane  
Snow Hill, Maryland 21863

1:00pm Wicomico County  
University of Maryland Extension office  
28647 Old Quantico Road  
Salisbury, MD

#### Wednesday, August 5<sup>th</sup>

9:00am Dorchester County  
County Council Chambers  
501 Court Lane  
Cambridge, MD 21613

6:00pm Queen Anne's County  
Queen Anne's 4H Park  
Centreville, MD

#### Thursday, August 6<sup>th</sup>

10:00am Harford County  
University of Maryland Extension office  
2335 Rock Spring Road  
Forest Hill, MD

2:00pm Cecil County  
The Calvert Grange Hall  
2357 Telegraph Road (Rt. 273)  
Rising Sun, MD

#### Friday, August 7<sup>th</sup>

1:00pm Kent County, University of Maryland Extension office  
709 Morgnec Road, Chestertown, MD

## **Climate Change, Estate Tax Reform, Clean Water Restoration Act & Health Care Reform Targeted by AFBF for August District Work Period Grassroots Lobbying**

AFBF has identified four issues that will likely be the subject of intense debate in Washington immediately after the August Recess. Grassroots farmer members must talk to their Representatives and Senators about these critical issues during town hall meetings in August. Please know that you should not feel limited by the four issues identified. It is important to make sure your elected officials have a clear understanding of what is happening your farm – economically, environmentally and agronomically.

Tips for effectively communicating your message to a Member of Congress at a town hall meeting:

1. Introduce yourself
2. Be cordial, friendly, positive and non-partisan
3. Ask for something – support, oppose, cosponsorship, etc
4. Always thank them for meeting with you and become their resource in the district

What Happens If...

1. The Member disagrees with you? Remain positive and on message, never become argumentative.
2. The Member is Unavailable? Meet with their staff. Congressional staffers provide information to the Member. Use this time to express the importance of the need for their assistance.
3. The Conversation Starts to Stray? You have a limited amount of time, use it wisely to express the importance of the issue to you!

Here are some of the issues to consider speaking about at the meetings:

### **1. The Climate Change Legislation**

This bill passed the House and is currently pending in the Senate. Maryland Farm Bureau and the American Farm Bureau Federation opposed this bill. Congressman Bartlett was the only member of the House Delegation to oppose the bill on final passage.

- Farm Bureau opposes Climate Change legislation and argues that it would increase input costs to farmers and ranchers because the cost to sue fossil fuels (coal, oil and natural gas) would increase. As fuel, electricity, general energy and manufacturing costs increase, so would fertilizer!
- Climate Change legislation could ultimately lead to regulation of production methods and practices – an outcome raising significant concerns.
- The agriculture sector is being asked to accept higher costs from the Climate Change bill; while all farmers and ranchers will face potentially higher costs, only a few stand to benefit. While some claim the legislation is good for agriculture, the fact is most fruit and vegetable producers will not qualify for offset benefits. Not all farmers will have the capacity to site wind turbines. Western ranchers whose operations are dependent on the use of federal lands for livestock forage have very limited offset opportunities. Not all areas of the country are able to productively adopt conservation tillage practices, thus restricting their offset possibilities. *Yet ALL producers will incur the same increased fuel, fertilizer and energy costs as all Americans.*
- The Climate Change bill does not provide incentives to develop new sources of energy – such as nuclear energy. The bill necessarily results in the reduction of coal fired energy production and offers no clear alternatives.
- The Climate Change bill puts a costly burden on U.S. businesses even if our competitors in India and China refuse to adopt similar practices. The result of U.S. only greenhouse gas reductions will have very limited impact on the environment and will result in a further migration of U.S. farm and manufacturing jobs overseas.

## **Estate Tax Reform**

Congress will be focusing on tax issues later this year and Estate Taxes will be one focus of the bill. Farm Bureau is seeking a higher exemption for agriculture operations - so farms and ranches are not harmed. The future of American agriculture depends on the Estate Tax exemption, and whether or not farmers can afford to purchase the land they need! Because Estate Taxes influence the sale of land, this tax can interfere with the orderly transfer of farmland to the next generation of farmers and ranchers.

The facts are:

- Individuals, family partnerships or family corporations own 98 percent of our nation's 2 million farms and ranches.
- Estate taxes threaten family owned farm and ranches and the livelihoods of families who make their living in production agriculture.
- It takes two and half years of farm returns for a moderate-sized farm operation to pay off the Estate Tax owed.

Your messages are critical in making sure that Estate Taxes are changed for all farmers and ranchers! Contact your members of Congress today.

Tell Congress about your farm or ranch:

- How does a \$3.5 million exemption impact you?
- Are you better served with a higher exemption?
- What if the exemption shrank to \$1 million?
- Are you looking to expand your operation or buy a farm, and cannot?
- Has your farm been affected by Estate Taxes, either because of a death in your family or by the high costs of estate planning?

These details will give Congress a better understanding of the impact their vote has on your family farm - and their constituent!

## **Clean Water Restoration Act**

Farm Bureau members were extremely successful last Congress in stopping this damaging bill from moving from the House. This year, Senator Russ Feingold (D-WI) introduced S. 787, which would greatly expand the regulatory reach of the Clean Water Act to the detriment of U.S. economic growth and agricultural operations. The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee passed this bill and it is moving towards consideration in the full Senate.

- If passed, nearly every wet area in the nation -- even if water is only present for a few days could become regulated by the federal government! This could include everything from ditches, to farm ponds, to prior converted cropland and possibly groundwater.
- This proposal would move the CWA beyond protecting wetlands and waterways, and create a regulatory nightmare for farmers, ranchers and property owners.

Urge your Senator not to cosponsor and not to support this legislation. If your Senator is a sponsor, your messages about the unintended consequences can force them to withdraw the co-sponsorship, just like we did last year in the House!

## **Health Care Reform**

The House Energy and Commerce Committee continued its markup of health care legislation this week. Farm Bureau wants to ensure that farm and ranch businesses that employ others are not burdened with costs that they cannot afford and opposes any healthcare legislation that includes an employer mandate. Farm Bureau sent a letter explaining our opposition to members of House.

Additionally, the letter addressed Farm Bureau's belief that health care reform legislation should address the disparities that exist between rural and non-rural communities. Farm Bureau urged committee members to:

- support equitable Medicare payment rates to rural hospitals and physicians and expand;
- enhance Medicare beneficiary access to telehealth services;
- address the critical shortage of qualified health care professionals and health care facilities; and
- create incentives such as scholarships and loans to students who agree to provide health care services in medically underserved areas.

Farming and ranching businesses operate on tight profit margins and are cyclical. Requiring employers to provide insurance coverage will put added financial strain on already struggling farm and ranch businesses because payment will be due whether or not a farm or ranch business turns a profit.

Farm Bureau believes that any health care reform must address the disparities that exist between rural and non-rural communities. There continues to be a critical shortage of health care facilities and qualified health care professionals in rural areas. In addition, many rural residents depend on small rural hospitals that face unique health care delivery challenges due to their size and case-mix.