

The Maryland Farm Bureau Hotline

Legislative proposals that impact Maryland's farm community



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National Update

Senate Climate Bill Introduced - Farm Bureau Opposes Bill

Senators Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) and John Kerry (D-Mass.) introduced the “Clean Energy Jobs and American Power Act,” the Senate climate bill. The bill is similar in many respects to the Waxman-Markey House bill, which Farm Bureau opposed. There are some key differences between the two that make the Senate bill even less friendly to agriculture than did the Waxman-Markey bill:

- The Senate bill provides no role for USDA in the administration of agricultural and forestry offsets.
- Agriculture and forestry are not guaranteed of participation in the offsets section. The president must decide to include such offsets on a “list” of eligible offset types that is within his discretion to designate.
- There is no moratorium on using controversial indirect land use principles in renewable fuels regulations.
- There is no protection against devastating EPA regulation of greenhouse gases under the Clean Air Act as was provided in the House bill.
- There are more stringent emissions targets than provided in the House bill. The Senate bill requires reductions of three percent by 2012 and 20 percent by 2020. The House bill required 17percent by 2020.

Building on the successful campaign against climate legislation during the August recess, AFBF announced a campaign to continue those activities for the duration of the climate debate. AFBF has developed key messages that are central to our concerns and opposition to the legislation. The messages are attached. More information will be provided on this campaign over the next few weeks.

The House and Senate climate bills will increase food and energy costs to consumers, create energy shortages resulting from the phase out of fossil fuels and not providing a

substitute source of energy to “plug the hole,” increase agricultural production costs and reduce our producers’ ability to compete in foreign markets.

FARM BUREAU OPPOSES THIS HARMFUL LEGISLATION.

ACTION REQUEST: Farm Bureau members should contact their Representatives and Senators to let them know that the farm community opposes both the House and Senate versions of the Climate Change bill.

Use this link to log onto your Representative’s website:

<http://www.house.gov/house/MemberWWW.shtml>.

Use this link to connect to Maryland’s Senators:

http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm . On the website click the links to send message to the Congressman and Senators. Explain how increased fuel and fertilizer costs will impact your farm.

Animal Welfare

While Farm Bureau members understand that animal wellbeing must always be a priority in on-farm production, recent videos depicting unacceptable farm animal treatment demonstrate that all it takes is one bad episode to give the entire industry a bad reputation. Given the “success” of these productions, a growing number of activist groups are intentionally hiring individuals to seek employment on farms and in processing plants solely for the purpose of capturing video that shows the mishandling of animals.

Many aspects of production transport, processing and retailing may be outside the individual producers’ direct and daily control. However, owners and operators must do all they can to educate themselves, their employees, and their contractors about industry animal handling guidelines, and hold all parties accountable for following proper policies and procedures. Employer recommendations include:

- All employees MUST BE properly vetted, including day labor. Be vigilant in hiring practices, checking applications, work history, backgrounds and references thoroughly. Be especially careful when hiring for positions where the job would allow general access to the full operation.
- All employees should be fully trained in basic animal care practices. Consider a thorough, comprehensive animal handling training session.
- Make sure employees are aware of the priority on proper animal care, and that ignoring or violating company policy on animal handling will not be tolerated.
- Encourage employees who observe a violation of policy to report it immediately.
- Investigate complaints thoroughly when they are received.
- Take swift and appropriate action if unacceptable animal handling occurs.

The Animal Agriculture Alliance, of which Farm Bureau is a member, has prepared recommendations to strengthen on-farm and facility security. This report addresses not only publicity implications, but also the security of the food supply that could be compromised by illicit or undercover employees. For a copy of the report, email valeriec.mdfb@verizon.net.

Healthcare Reform Update

The Senate Finance Committee ended discussion of its health care proposal last week. The committee will not vote on the measure until this week to allow time for the proposal to be scored.

During consideration, Sen. Blanche Lincoln (D-Ark.) was able to change the bill so that seasonal workers won't count against thresholds that disqualify small employers from tax credits that help them buy insurance for their employees. Under the legislation, employers of no more than 25 employees are eligible for the credits.

Farm Bureau is also supporting a Hagan (D-N.C.) provision contained in the Health Education Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee bill that doesn't count seasonal workers against the employment level that triggers an employer requirement to provide health insurance for its employees.

Senate leadership will now begin the process of merging the HELP and Finance Committee's bill into a package for Senate floor consideration. There are several differences between the two bills. The HELP Committee bills proposed a public option (government health insurance) while the Finance Committee proposed a health care cooperative to increase competition. Farm Bureau supports the cooperative approach. The HELP bill mandates that employers with more than 25 workers provide health insurance or pay a fee. The Finance Committee does not and instead says the employers must reimburse the government when a worker claims a health care tax credit when buying their own insurance. Farm Bureau opposes employer mandates.

House leadership is continuing its work to combine the three bills passed by Energy and Commerce, Education and Labor and the Ways and Means Committees. One unresolved issue of concern to Farm Bureau is Medicare reimbursement rates and whether or not payments made under a public option are tied to Medicare reimbursement rates. Rural health providers are currently compensated at lower rates than suburban and urban providers. Farm Bureau believes that rural Medicare payment rates should be increased and that payments under any public option should be negotiated rather than based on Medicare.

Health care reform will have a huge impact on the cost, quality and availability of the health insurance that farmers and ranchers purchase for themselves and their families and for the workers they employ.

GAO: ETHANOL TAX CREDIT NO LONGER NEEDED

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) says the 45 cent-a-gallon tax credit for blending corn with gasoline may no longer be needed to stimulate conventional corn ethanol production because the domestic industry has matured. Congress should consider revising or ending the credit, GAO said.

Ethanol production is well understood, and its capacity is already near a 15 billion gallon-a-year congressional requirement for conventional ethanol, according to the GAO report. GAO estimated the tax credit supporting conventional corn ethanol production could cost the U.S. \$6.75 billion in lost revenue by 2015, up from \$4 billion last year. The credit does not stimulate additional ethanol consumption, according to GAO.

The GAO report also said increasing demand for corn for ethanol production has contributed to higher corn prices.

Farm Bureau supports the 45 cent-a-gallon tax credit at its current level.

USDA FUNDING BILL AWAITING OBAMA SIGNATURE

The Senate on Thursday passed the \$121.13 billion fiscal year 2010 agricultural spending bill. The measure now goes to President Barack Obama who is expected to swiftly sign it.

The bill would increase overall spending by nearly 12 percent from the previous year and would provide \$350 million in emergency relief for dairy farmers. Language also is included that will allow poultry products imported from China.

The Senate passed the House-Senate conference report 76-22. The House approved the bill Wednesday.

A key part of the bill is the establishment of an inspection process that could allow China to export poultry to the United States again, which was banned through language in the annual USDA funding bill for several years. The bill requires “audits and on-site reviews of facilities before any Chinese facilities are certified as eligible to ship poultry products to the U.S.,” according to a news release from the House and Senate appropriations committees.

USDA Announces Start of Sign-Up for 2010 DCP/ACRE Programs

USDA announced last week that sign-up has begun for 2010 DCP/ACRE programs. Sign-up will continue through June 1, 2010. For 2010, farmers can request advanced direct payments up to 22 percent of their total direct payments. These advanced payments will be issued beginning December 1, 2009.

Farmers should visit their local FSA office to sign-up, or they can utilize USDA's website: www.fsa.usda.gov/dcp. A final payment eligibility rule governing issues like direct attribution, the definition of "actively engaged" in farming and adjusted gross income caps is not yet available for 2010 but is expected in the near future.

State Update

GICA to Hold Listening Session on Ag Viability

The Governor's Intergovernmental Commission for Agriculture (GICA) will host a listening session entitled: "Facilitating and Fostering a Viable Agricultural Industry" during Maryland's Statewide Rural Roundtable on Thursday, October 22, from 1:30-3:15 p.m. at the Doubletree Hotel, 210 Holiday Court, in Annapolis.

The goal of the listening session is to facilitate dialogue between the agriculture sector and local officials. The session will solicit input on a number of issues including: planning and zoning terms and regulations, slaughter houses, interpretation of health regulations and varying health regulatory requirements at the local level, how agriculture is changing, Main Street revitalization, backyard farmers, water issues, and more.

Secretary Hance, with assistance from Gabe Zepp, agricultural marketing specialist in Carroll County and GICA member, will facilitate the listening session. GICA's mission is to promote the economic profitability of agriculture in the State by ensuring that all appropriate State agencies work in a cooperative, coordinated manner with local government and industry groups in planning, implementing, overseeing and evaluating intergovernmental initiatives related to agricultural affairs of the State.

To attend only the GICA listening session of the event, there is no charge. To attend the entire Statewide Rural Roundtable event, please visit: www.rural.state.md.us to register.

LEAD Maryland Foundation, Inc. and the Maryland Agricultural Education Foundation, Inc. Joint Fundraising Event

"Partnerships at Work" is the theme for this year's Sporting Clays Tournament to benefit LEAD MD and MAEF. The event will take place on Sunday, October 25, 2009 at Pintail Point in Queenstown, MD. Registration begins 10:30 with a shooting start time of 11:00.

Registration options for the Sporting Clay tournament include:

Non-shooter Registration: \$40

- Catered Luncheon
- Fun activities for the whole family, including a corn maze and putt-putt

Individual Registration: \$65

- Registration for full event
- Catered Luncheon
- Exceptional camaraderie and entertainment

Event Sponsorship: \$50

- Sponsorship signage with logo
 - Recognition in program
 - Recognition on LEAD and MAEF websites
- Partnership Stimulus Shooting

Package: \$300

- Registration for four (4) attendees
- Catered Luncheon
- Sponsorship signage with logo
- Recognition in program
- Recognition on LEAD and MAEF websites

A portion of the fee is tax deductible.

For more information or to register contact Corinne Williams 410.939.9030 or cwilliams@maefonline.com.