

FARMERS MAKE THEIR VOICE HEARD IN WASHINGTON



Seventy-five Maryland Farm Bureau members made their way to the District of Columbia on March 29th for the Washington Drive-In. The annual event allows farmers to meet with their Congressional representatives and discuss pending legislation that impacts their daily business.

“The Drive-In is one of the best experiences we have each year,” said Maryland Farm Bureau President Patricia Langenfelder. “It is a great opportunity for farmers to learn more about timely issues and gives them a chance to meet face to face with our lawmakers.”

The day began at the American Farm Bureau Federation Headquarters where senior staff discussed the 2012 Farm Bill, pesticide legislation, the Chesapeake Bay and trade issues. Members made their way to the Hill for lunch with the state’s Congressional Delegation in the Rayburn House Office Building. Senator Ben Cardin and Congressman Andy Harris spoke to the delegation.

Following lunch, members broke into smaller groups and visited each of the 10 Congressional offices to explain the impact of current legislation. “Nothing can replace the real-life stories and examples coming first-hand from our farmers,” said Langenfelder. “Our elected officials and their aides need to know how this will affect family farms and their constituents.”



AMONG THE TOPICS WERE:

- CLEAN WATER ACT** ~ The Environmental Protection Agency wants to expand its Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) authority to gain greater regulatory authority over nonpoint sources. Farm Bureau believes runoff from agricultural nonpoint sources is a state and not a federal responsibility.

- AGRICULTURE CHEMICALS** ~ Farm Bureau believes implementation of the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) should be based on credible scientific information in order to benefit farmers, the environment and the public, and should be the sole federal regulatory authority over pesticides. Farm Bureau opposes any regulation that would require a permit prior to application of a chemical for crop protection.

- FARM BILL** ~ Most of the programs included in the 2008 farm bill expire in 2012. As debate begins, the discussion will be overshadowed by talks of the budget deficit. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that the deficit in 2012 will be almost \$1.5 trillion. An adequate farm safety net is imperative. Farmers are willing to do their part to reduce the overall budget deficit, but should not be asked to do more than their fair share, especially given the reductions already taken. The budget cannot be balanced by simply cutting farm programs. In fact, farm programs account for less than one half

of one percent of total federal spending. The Federal Reserve states that “rural America is leading the U.S. economic recovery,” but also notes that farm debt has risen “the fastest since the prelude to the 1980s farm debt crisis.” Additionally, the United Nations predicts that farmers will have to produce 70 percent more food by 2050, making a safety net that protects the farmers that will grow this food paramount to international food security.

- TRADE AGREEMENTS** ~ Congress needs to pass the three outstanding free trade agreements that combined represent almost \$2.5 billion in additional exports. These are lost opportunities for farmers and the U.S. They are the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement, U.S.-Panama Trade Promotion Agreement and the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement.

Maryland Farm Bureau is a private, non-profit membership organization. It is controlled by its members through the democratic process and is financed by voluntary membership dues. Its strength comes from the active participation of over 34,000 member families that belong to the state’s 23 county Farm Bureaus.

