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Journal of Agricultural Lending



AMERICAN
BANKERS
ASSOCIATION®

Spring 2002
Vol. 15, No. 3

**Spring 2002
Vol. 15, Issue 3**

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Journal of Agricultural Lending

*Since 1986, designed for agricultural lenders as the catalyst
for new ideas and practical approaches to banking challenges.*

Publisher

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630-637-0199

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Naperville, IL 60540
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The Journal of Agricultural Lending (ISSN Pending) is published quarterly for the American Bankers Association by Countryside Marketing, Inc., PMB 285, 1212 S. Naper Blvd., Suite 119, Naperville, IL 60540. Copyright 2002 by ABA. All rights reserved. No part of this journal may be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the copyright holder. ABA and CMI assume no responsibility for statements of fact or opinions expressed in signed articles in this journal. Annual North America subscription rate is \$60 (U.S.) for ABA members, and \$90 (U.S.) for nonmembers. Contact publisher for other foreign rates. Electronic subscription available at \$60 (U.S.) worldwide.

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Cover photo courtesy of
Capital Agricultural Property Services, Inc.

Dear Reader,

We have a deal on a new Farm Bill. While details still need to be ironed out, it appears the House and Senate Conferees have reached an agreement. This is a big relief in farm country. Now the busy season will begin at USDA as the program experts, lawyers and policy guys crank out all the new regulations and procedures that the legislation will demand.

Did we learn anything during all of the debate on this farm bill? It is clear to me that there were some important signals that should not be missed in all of the cacophony of noise that always surrounds farm legislation in the capital city. Here are a couple of the more obvious ones.

- **Anyone who gets a farm check in the future has to get used to everyone in the world knowing about it.** We can thank (or blame) the Environmental Working Group for putting all of the payment data on their website. It was the hottest news story about agriculture in 2001 and 2002 so far. The fact is it is public money, and the public has the right to know where their money is going. Now, its up to USDA to provide the data on their web site. Let's face it, the cat is way out of the bag. USDA should stop giving ewg.org a platform to sell their views at agriculture's expense.

- **The "well of goodwill" that has supported agriculture for many years has been pumped hard this time.** There is tremendous positive public sentiment about agriculture and the people who farm and ranch. Even the most urbanized American is dimly aware that farming and ranching is hard work and that the people that do this work face unbelievable odds every day. But, the popular press has pounded federal farm programs without mercy this year. I think some real damage has been done to the image of agriculture in general and to the farm payments that have, since 1998, been so important in avoiding a very significant financial collapse in agriculture.

Soon, we will know all of the details and we can get to work on trying to understand what it all means. You can count on the *Journal of Agricultural Lending* to help you sort it out.

John



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