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Washington Scene: On the Hill

Ag Committee Leaders—109th Congress. Republican Representative Bob Goodlatte of Virginia continues as Chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture. Republican Senator Saxby Chambliss of Georgia is the new Chairman of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. He succeeds Senator Thad Cochran of Mississippi, who is the new Chairman of the full Senate Committee on Appropriations. Democratic Representative Collin Peterson of Minnesota is the new Ranking Member (senior minority party member) of the House Committee. He succeeds Representative Charlie Stenholm of Texas, who was defeated for re-election. Democratic Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa continues as the Ranking Member of the Senate Committee.

Budget. Concerns over continuing federal budget deficits could lead to “budget reconciliation” in 2005. If budget reconciliation were to occur, most, if not all, authorizing committees would be required to “share the pain” of reducing the deficit in a coordinated fashion by developing legislation to reduce spending on their mandatory programs. (Mandatory spending is spending other than through annual appropriations). For the Agriculture Committees, mandatory spending programs include food stamps and other nutrition, commodity, conservation, crop insurance, selected research, export, forestry, transportation, and rural development programs.

Livestock Issues. The committees will provide input and oversight on a number of livestock issues including the fol-

lowing: the US BSE surveillance program, BSE and beef trade with Canada; BSE and beef trade with Japan; a national animal identification system; country-of-origin labeling; and reauthorizing mandatory price reporting (authority expires in September, 2005).

Trade Issues. The committees will provide input and oversight on a number of trade issues including the following: BSE and beef trade with Canada; BSE and beef trade with Japan and other countries in Asia; the Doha Round negotiations in the WTO; a number of bilateral and subregional negotiations on trade agreements, including those with Thailand, Panama, three Andean countries, and selected Middle East countries; the Central America Free Trade Agreement; and the US-Brazil WTO cotton case (a WTO decision on the US appeal is expected in early March).

Futures Markets. The committees will be reauthorizing the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, the independent federal agency that oversees the trading of futures contracts in the United States in accordance with the Commodity Exchange Act. As part of the reauthorization process, the committees will consider whether changes to the CEA are needed to improve market oversight.

Farm Bill Hearings. The House will start preliminary hearings on the next farm bill. (The current farm bill expires in 2007). Hearings will be held both in Washington, DC, and around the country.