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CHOICES
The magazine of food, farm, and resource issues
3rd Quarter 2005 • 20(3)
A publication of the American Agricultural Economics Association

Washington Scene

By Co-editors, Joe L. Outlaw, *Choices* and Tamara Wagester, CFARE

The majority of the attention in Washington in recent months has focused on the Roberts Supreme Court nomination, Hurricane Katrina, and trying to finalize the appropriations bills with looming budget deficits. Although these issues remain at the forefront of most staffers' minds, legislation continues to proceed in areas of interest to our profession, including: trade, livestock reporting, farm bill, BSE, environment, energy, endangered species, and appropriations.

Trade

President Bush spoke before the U.N. General Assembly requesting that countries work together in the Doha negotiations to eliminate agricultural subsidies and tariffs. Meanwhile, E.U. Agriculture Commissioner Mariann Fischer Boel met with Administration and Congressional leadership during a trip to Washington, DC in mid-September. She stressed that the E.U.'s willingness to reduce its export subsidies depends on, among other things, the willingness of the United States to reduce commodity food aid and shift to a cash system. Finally, in early September the United States and Saudi Arabia concluded negotiations on issues related to Saudi Arabia's accession to the World Trade Organization.

Livestock Mandatory Reporting

The House of Representatives passed by voice vote a bill extending the 1999 Livestock Mandatory Reporting Act through 2010, which would change the law's reporting requirements for swine transactions. The Senate passed, by unanimous consent, its own version.

Farm Bill

The U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Johanns has taken an early lead in the 2007 Farm Bill discussions by holding numerous listening sessions around the country. For more details on time and locations of the listening sessions, please visit USDA's website at www.usda.gov.

BSE

A September 19 issue of *National Journal* highlighted a statement by FDA Commissioner Crawford that the United States may change feed regulations so they are similar to those in Canada. Meanwhile, in late September the Senate voted to cut off Japanese beef imports to the United States until Japan lifts its embargo on U.S. beef shipments.

Environment

A resolution that would have overturned a Bush administration rule limiting air emissions of mercury from power plants failed passage in the Senate in mid-September.

Energy

The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee has held hearings on climate change, emphasizing the relationship between energy consumption and climate change, and the potential economic impacts and efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Endangered Species Act

House Resources Chairman Richard Pombo (CA-11) introduced legislation in mid-September to rewrite the Threatened and Endangered Species Recovery Act of 2005. Pombo's bill, H.R. 3824, would provide greater results conserving and recovering listed species and would repeal the critical habitat designation for threatened species.

Hurricane Katrina's Impacts on Agriculture Policy

Numerous items of legislation have been introduced in the House and Senate focusing on assistance to victims of Hurricane Katrina, including several that have implica-

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tions for agriculture and rural development. On September 20, USDA released a preliminary assessment of U.S. agricultural production losses from the summer's natural disasters. They estimated the losses to be nearly $900 million. A group of senators sent correspondence to President Bush asking for disaster aid for farmers throughout the country who have sustained damages from Hurricane Katrina or other natural disasters. Senator Kent Conrad (ND) introduced S. 1692, which is intended to provide disaster assistance to agricultural producers for crop and livestock losses.

Appropriations

The end of the Fiscal Year is always a busy time for Appropriations Committee staff and members. Hurricane Katrina has added more turmoil to the season. In spite of the Hurricane, Senate Appropriations Chairman Cochran (MS), and House Appropriations Chairman Lewis (CA-41), are still hoping to avoid an Omnibus spending bill for FY 2006.