

**WEEKLY UPDATE**  
**SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE COALITION**  
**April 23-27, 2007**

**ACTION NEEDED**

**Good News!** The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Initiative is moving very close to introduction by Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA) in the Senate and Rep. Stephanie Herseth Sandlin (D-SD) and Tim Walz (D-MN) in the House. The next four or five days are the last best chance for us to find them some original co-sponsors. Please call your Senators or Representative and ask them to sign-on as co-sponsors of the bill. Click on the following link for the full action alert: [Beginning Farmer Initiative Alert](#)

**More Good News!** We have been encouraging you to stimulate action to get co-sponsors for the Competitive and Fair Agricultural Markets Act (S. 622) introduced by Senators Harkin (D-IA), Enzi (R-WY) and others. This week we learned that Rep. Leonard Boswell (D-IA), the Chairman of the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Livestock, Dairy and Poultry, very soon will be introducing the House version of this bill. So for those who are able to cue up more action on this key issue, co-sponsors should now be sought for both the Senate and soon-to-be House bills. A full action alert with more information is on our website at: [Competition Title Alert](#).

**THIS WEEK**

**Congress Approves Supplemental; Veto Awaits; CSP Victory:** On Monday, House and Senate conferees on the FY 2007 Supplemental Appropriations bill (H.R. 1519) to fund the war in Iraq reached agreement on a conference report with \$124.2 billion in supplemental FY2007 funding. The House approved the bill on Wednesday by a vote of 218-208 and the Senate passed it on Thursday by a vote of 51-46. President Bush has declared the final bill “dead before arrival” and vowed to veto it when it gets to his desk next week because of the inclusion of nonbinding timetables for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq and the addition of domestic spending. A second version of the bill will likely be wrapped up and sent back to the President by late May.

The great news for SAC is that the measure includes funding to lift the current cap on 2007 funding for the Conservation Security Program. This would allow the 51 watershed CSP sign-up announced by USDA to go forward and would allow the contract modifications from earlier year contracts to be finalized and payments to start. Our thanks to SAC members and partners for helping with targeted letters to the key House conferees on very short notice! The letters clearly had a positive impact.

Unfortunately, there was not an opportunity to get back the \$2.9 billion that was stolen from CSP in an earlier supplemental appropriation, though we knew from the start that getting that would have taken a near miracle. But, when a version of the supplemental eventually gets signed into law, the CSP will at least keep moving forward and we live to fight another day on CSP farm bill funding. SAC is confident that the measures for agriculture in the bill, including the removal of the CSP cap, will make it through subsequent negotiations on the supplemental.

The Milk Income Loss Contract dairy payment fix sponsored by Senator Leahy (D-VT) also did get in the final bill, over and against the 1 year discretionary fix that Rep. Obey (D-WI) had put in the House bill. This is very important because it provides baseline funding for MILC in the farm bill. The measure also included \$3.5 billion in agricultural disaster assistance and other support for domestic programs. An important fix to the way that appraisals are done in the Wetlands Reserve Program, which had been included in the Senate version of the bill, unfortunately did not get into the final bill. It will now have to be addressed in the farm bill, and 2007 sign-ups will proceed without the benefit of the correction.

**FY 2008 Ag Appropriations Moving Soon:** Even as the negotiations on FY 2007 supplemental funding bill continues and as the conference negotiations over the FY 2008 budget resolution plod along, the House Appropriation Subcommittees are under orders from Chairman David Obey (D-WI) to start moving their FY2008 appropriation bills within the next two weeks. Earlier it was rumored that the agriculture spending bill would be one of the first to be marked up. This year's appropriations process includes new guidelines on dealing with earmarks to increase congressional accountability and transparency.

As a reminder on **sustainable agriculture priorities** for the 2008 spending bill, we are attaching along with the Weekly Update a summary of our appropriations requests. We are in particular highlighting the campaign to secure \$20 million in funding for this the coming 20th anniversary year of the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program. If you would like to be a part of that effort, be in touch with Aimee Witteman as soon as possible at 202-547-5754.

**Senate Specialty Crops, Organics, Dairy Hearing:** On Tuesday, the Senate Agriculture Committee held a hearing on specialty crops and dairy. Chairman Harkin (D-IA) opened the hearing by reaffirming his commitment to make organic agriculture, particularly organic research issues, as an important part of the upcoming Farm Bill. He emphasized the need for increased attention to the issue of colony collapse disorder among honeybees and the importance of including fruit and vegetable initiatives in the farm bill.

The first panel addressed specialty crops, organics and issues surrounding colony collapse disorder. Kathie Arnold, a NY dairy farmer (and Weekly Update reader!) representing the National Organic Coalition, stressed the need for a "fair share" of Farm bill research dollars devoted to organics, full funding and nationwide implementation of CSP, improvements in insurance products available to organic farmers, and an updated organic cost share program. Emily Jackson, Program Coordinator for the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project and testifying on behalf of the Community Food Security Coalition, talked about the importance of increased support for the Community Food Project grants, Value-Added Producer Grants, and the Farmers Market Promotion Program, as well as the need for legislative clarification of USDA's mission to promote local food procurement in public schools. President of the American Honey Association, Mark Brady, spoke about the urgent need to address the looming crisis of colony collapse disorder.

The second panel dealt with fruits and vegetables and the third with dairy. To see the testimony, go to <http://www.agriculture.senate.gov/Hearings/hearings.cfm>. The House Agriculture Committee also held its dairy farm bill hearing on Tuesday; see <http://agriculture.house.gov/hearings/statements.html>

**Commodity Hearings:** Both the House and Senate Ag Committees held hearings this week to hear testimony from commodity groups and others on the commodity title of the farm bill. On Wednesday, the Senate heard from the whole panoply of commodity groups as well as from National Farmers Union, Farm Bureau, American Farmland Trust, and Bread for the World. On Thursday, the House heard from agribusiness plus NFU and AFBF. At both hearings, NFU proposed ending direct payments and investing the savings into higher target prices for counter-cyclical payments and a permanent disaster program. Farm Bureau on the other hand argued for leaving all three types of commodity program payments exactly as they are now, with no changes.

On Monday, the Farm Bureau released its full farm bill proposal. One plank in particular caught our eye – a proposal to shift over \$2 billion from the CSP to EQIP for a new special EQIP carve out for specialty crops. The full AFBF platform is at <http://www.fb.org/index.php?fuseaction=newsroom.farmbill2007>. Bill Flory, the AFT witness, said as part of his testimony, "I am a tier III CSP producer, and so I strongly believe in the concept of a rewards program. I believe that this concept is alive and well out in the countryside but it is in need of significant help and nurturing. I urge this Committee to re-commit itself to

finding a workable "green payments" program as an additional stream of income to reward producers across the landscape for their stewardship of our nation's resources." A third CSP quip of the week comes from House Chairman Peterson (D-MN) as quoted in *Congress Daily* today: "(The CSP) is too damn complicated and needs to be simplified."

**NRN Holds Rural Development Press Conference:** On Wednesday, the National Rural Network hosted a Capitol Hill press event addressing the need for a renewed commitment to rural development in the upcoming Farm Bill. Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Harkin (D-IA) and Senator Hillary Clinton (D-NY) attended to offer remarks confirming their strong support for and increased investment in rural development in the upcoming Farm Bill, both noting the critical need for improved rural broadband access and infrastructure development. Also attending the event were Representative John Barrow (D-GA) and USDA Rural Development Under Secretary Tom Dorr.

## NEXT WEEK

**Senate Conservation Title Hearing:** On Tuesday afternoon, Ferd Hoefner will be testifying for SAC at the Senate Ag Committee hearing on the conservation title. Ferd will be joined by witnesses from National Wildlife Federation, National Association of Conservation Districts, National Farmers Union, and the National Association of State Foresters.

**Capitol Hill Farmers Market Event:** The Project for Public Space will host its fourth annual Farmers Market briefing and reception next Thursday. With featured speakers representing the spectrum of farmers market advocates and supporters, this year's event will focus on the powerful role of markets can play in bridging the gap between rural and urban communities while advancing sustainable development in both. SAC is co-sponsoring the event along with the Northeast Midwest Institute and the Community Food Security Coalition. Speakers at the briefing will include Elaine Brown, Executive Director of SAC member organization Michigan Integrated Food & Farming Systems, and SAC staffer Tazuer Smith.

## USDA NEWS

**USDA Sends Farm Bill Legislative Proposals to Congress:** On Wednesday, USDA Secretary Johanns sent legislative language for USDA's farm bill proposals for the conservation and credit titles to Congress. Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Tom Harkin (D-IA) said he welcomed the Bush Administration proposals, while Ranking Member Senator Saxby Chambliss (R-GA) and House Chairman Peterson were less enthusiastic. The USDA conservation proposal would combine the Environmental Quality Incentives Program with the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, the Agricultural Management Assistance Program, and the Forestland Enhancement Program. It would also combine the Farm and Ranch Land Protection and Grasslands Reserve programs into a single program. The proposal would expand a scaled-down version of the Conservation Security Program from 16 million acres to 96 million acres over the next ten years. The Wetlands Reserve Program would be increased from 2.3 million acres to 3.5 million acres. USDA is also proposing a sod-saver provision to discourage grassland conversion. The legislative proposal is posted at [www.usda.gov/documents/fbconservation\\_07.doc](http://www.usda.gov/documents/fbconservation_07.doc).

The credit title legislative proposal would change the existing Beginning Farmer and Rancher Down Payment Loan Program by cutting the interest rate in half to two percent, deferring the initial payment for one year and increasing the maximum loan value, as well as creating a first priority for beginning and minority farmers for direct farm ownership loans. The credit title proposal is posted on the web at [http://www.usda.gov/documents/fbcredit\\_07.doc](http://www.usda.gov/documents/fbcredit_07.doc). USDA plans to release legislative language for energy and rural development titles next week.

**Oklahoma CREP Announced:** On Monday, USDA announced a new \$20.6 million Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program agreement with Oklahoma to create up to 9,000 acres of riparian buffers and filter strips. The conservation plantings are intended to reduce the flow of nutrients, sediment and other pollutants in the Spavinaw Lake and Illinois River/Lake Tenkiller watersheds. The watersheds within the CREP's boundary are significant drinking water sources for Tulsa and have been the focus of a lawsuit brought by the OK Attorney General against the poultry industry. The lawsuit alleges that run-off from the large number poultry CAFOs in Arkansas and Oklahoma has polluted Oklahoma drinking water sources. The City of Tulsa is one of the CREP partners. The CREP project seeks to filter runoff, stabilize stream banks, shade stream channels, and improve drinking water and aquatic habitat by creating 500 acres of filter strips and 8,500 acres of riparian buffers. More information about the program can be found in the Oklahoma CREP fact sheet posted online at [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov); click on Find FSA Fact Sheets.

## **DULY NOTED**

This week's Duly Noted special theme is **TRANSITIONS**.

**Margaret Huelsman Leaving SAC:** In an effort to promote clearer and more effective coalition structure and identity, the member groups of SAC and MSAWG voted earlier this year to reconfigure the coalition under the single title of the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (SAC) by the end 2007. MSAWG will continue to exist, but as a functioning program unit within the coalition structure. Motivated by this decision and an interest in the SAC staff's ability to work closely together on a daily basis, the Coordinating Council has determined that the SAC staff location will be re-established in a single office site in Washington D.C.

If this staffing decision was important, it was also very difficult. Margaret Huelsman has been based from her home office in Indianapolis since she joined SAC as Executive Director in 2005. Due to her personal and family commitments there, she is not able to relocate and will be transitioning from her position at the end of July. We are grateful for the leadership, enthusiasm, and commitment Margaret has brought to her work with SAC and MSAWG, and to the broader sustainable agriculture movement. Her vision of a more effective, organized coalition is what precipitated recent structural changes and we thank her for graciously pursuing and supporting the best interests of the organization. We look forward to working with Margaret to ensure a smooth transition over the next several months and of staying in touch with her as she pursues new endeavors.

**Brother David Andrews Leaving the National Catholic Rural Life Conference:** It was with much surprise and excitement for his new adventures, that SAC received news of another transition within the sustainable agriculture community. After thirteen years of dedicated service to National Catholic Rural Life Conference and the sustainable agriculture movement, Br. Dave Andrews will be leaving his post as executive director of NCRLC at the end of May to pursue a new position as the Coordinator of Peace and Justice for his Congregation of Holy Cross in the Chicago area. The sustainable agriculture community will certainly miss Br. Dave's dynamic personality and gift of building bridges between those within and outside of the movement. His tenure on the SAC and MSAWG Coordinating Council included several years as chair, and his leadership skills and participation in our Issue Committees will be sorely missed. We wish Br. Dave well and look forward to working with him in his new capacity on down the road. And we wish all our NCRLC friends well as they make their way through this important transition.