

WEEKLY UPDATE
SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE COALITION
April 2-6, 2007

ACTION NEEDED

We need your help! Please! Support for CSP in Supplemental Appropriations Bill!: The Senate version of the pending supplemental appropriations bill lifts the spending cap on the Conservation Security program for 2007, providing at a minimum an additional \$115 million to allow USDA to hold a 2007 CSP sign-up in 50 or more new watersheds – at least one in each state. The funding would also allow USDA to fulfill the contract modifications and additional conservation benefits proposed by existing CSP farmers.

The fate of the CSP now rests with the House-Senate conference committee that will work out a unified bill. The conference decisions will be made during the next two weeks. There are just a few critical legislators we need to target with phone calls and faxes to keep CSP alive. If you live in or have action list contacts in the following districts or states, please contact Aimee Witteman at (202) 547-5754 or awitteman@sustainableagriculturecoalition.org for a copy of the relevant action alert: **California, Connecticut, Utah, West Virginia, and Wisconsin (7th district only).**

We Want to Hear From You! If you were able to visit with any of your Members or attend their roundtables and town hall meetings this week while the Senate and House were on recess, we would love to hear about it. Email Aimee at awitteman@sustainableagriculturecoalition.org and report on the event, the farm bill or ag appropriations issues discussed, and any statements of support or commitments made.

If you did not get a chance to meet with your Member this week, you still have another chance! The House is on recess through the 13th. Be sure to check out the Town Hall meetings your Members of Congress may be holding back in the state or district. Visit your Member's website or call their office to find out where and when they will be holding events. If you would like any policy backgrounders, talking points, or a copy of the updated policy platform of the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, please contact Aimee Witteman at (202) 547-5754 or awitteman@sustainableagriculturecoalition.org.

THIS WEEK

Chesapeake Bay Farm Bill Introduced: Last Thursday March 29, Representatives Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), Bobby Scott (D-VA), Wayne Gilchrest (R-MD), and Tom Davis (R-VA) introduced the "Chesapeake's Healthy and Environmentally Sound Stewardship of Energy and Agriculture Act of 2007" (H.R. 1766). The bill is posted at www.cbf.org/site/DocServer/CHESSEA_marker_bill.pdf?docID=8023.

The CHESSEA Act would remove the cap from CSP funding and prioritize CSP funding for water quality. It would provide \$2 billion per year for EQIP but with no change in the payment limit and no provisions to prevent EQIP from being used for large-scale new or expanding CAFOs. The bill sets specific funding levels for the Chesapeake Bay region and establishes a technical assistance pilot program in the watershed. There is also \$500 million in new funding for biorefineries, with at least 15 percent of the funds directed to the Chesapeake Bay region. The bill provides that these biorefinery projects should meet environmental goals for air and water quality developed by USDA in consultation with EPA, Energy, Interior, and the National Academy of Sciences. In the Chesapeake Bay states, awards are to be granted to refineries that produce biodiesel from no-till soybeans, cellulosic ethanol, manure to energy, and other processes that promote the use of biomass and reduction of nutrient impacts to water quality.

Interstate Meat Bills: Also last Thursday, Representatives Ron Kind (D-WI), David Obey (D-WI), Gwen Moore (D-WI), Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), Nancy Boyda (D-KS), and Jim Marshall (D-GA) introduced the "Expanding Markets for Small Meat Processors Act" (H.R. 1760), a bill to remove the current ban on interstate sales of state-inspected meat and poultry. A second set of bills aimed at the same result are expected to be introduced later in April by Reps. Earl Pomeroy (D-ND) and Roy Blunt (R-MO) and Senators Herb Kohl (D-WI) and Orrin Hatch (R-UT). The flurry of activity brings the issue back onto the congressional radar screen, though with strong opposition from both national meat industry and national consumer organizations, moving the legislation forward will not be easy.

U.S. Supreme Court Declines Review of Nebraska Anti-Corporate Farming Case: On Monday, the U.S. Supreme Court announced that it would not hear an appeal of a ruling by the Federal Appeals Court for the Eighth Circuit that found Nebraska's anti-corporate farming constitutional provision, I-300, in violation of the federal Constitution's Commerce Clause. In 2004, the U.S. Supreme Court also refused to hear an appeal of a decision declaring South Dakota's ban on corporate farming unconstitutional because it interfered with interstate commerce. For additional information on I-300, the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling, and next steps for Nebraska, see the Center for Rural Affairs press release posted at <http://www.cfra.org/node/295>.

President Bush Appoints Susan Dudley as Head of OMB's Regulatory Chief: On Wednesday, President Bush used the opportunity of the Easter recess to appoint Susan Dudley as head of the Office of Management and Budget's Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, the office that reviews all major federal regulations and can significantly weaken or stall a regulation. The move allows the Administration to bypass hearings on Dudley's nomination in the Senate, where she faces strong opposition. Dudley was first nominated by Bush during the last Congress but her nomination came to an end when Senator Susan Collins (R-ME), the Chair of the Committee reviewing her nomination, said she would not bring the nomination to a vote because of a lack of support. Bush re-nominated Dudley for the position in January 2007. Before coming to the Bush Administration, Dudley was a senior scholar at the conservative Mercatus Center, an industry-funded, anti-regulatory think tank, where she espoused weakening of environmental and public health regulations. Public Citizen and OMB Watch have prepared a report on Dudley's viewpoints and the Mercatus Center, which is posted on the web at <http://www.ombwatch.org/regs/2006/dudleyreport.pdf>.

NEXT WEEK

Farm Bill Hearings: Next week the Senate will return to Washington, but the House will still be out on recess. The week after next (April 16-20) is looking like it will shape up as a major week for farm bill hearings. The House Ag Committee will likely be doing hearings on competition, organic, and conservation issues on the 17, 18, and 19th respectively, with the Senate Committee also likely to be holding several as well, including livestock and competition issues (probably the 18th) and perhaps one other farm bill title. None of them have been publicly announced, and may not be totally firm dates yet. We will no doubt have a full, confirmed list in next week's Weekly Update.

USDA NEWS

No Early Opt-Out for CRP Contracts in the Near Future: Late last Friday, USDA Secretary Johanns announced that USDA does not anticipate it will waive penalties for Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contract holders to get out of their contracts to bring land back into production. USDA had announced earlier this year that it was considering an early opt-out of CRP to allow landowners to plant corn to help meet the increased demand for corn ethanol in response to federal and state subsidies and tax incentives. USDA deferred the decision until after last Friday's release of USDA's report on prospective crop plantings. After reviewing the report, Secretary Johanns announced that a projected increase in corn

planting to 90.5 million acres, a 15 percent or 12 million acre increase over 2006, is sufficient to meet the demand for corn. He also re-affirmed that there would be no general CRP signup in 2007 but he re-opened the possibility of new enrollments in 2008. Johanns also emphasized that continuous CRP remains open for sign-up and noted that USDA had just established a new 500,000 acre initiative for continuous CRP contracts on a state by state basis that address specific habitat needs of fish or wildlife.

The Secretary concluded that he would monitor the demand for corn and "... make adjustments to USDA programs if needed to achieve a balance in the agricultural sector." This is a clear signal that USDA intends to use the CRP as a supply management tool to manage the price of corn between high prices wanted by corn producers and lower prices wanted by the livestock/poultry sector and ethanol refiners.

Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program Funding Available: USDA has issued a notice that about \$48 million in FY2007 funding is available for the purchase of agricultural conservation easements under the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP). Proposals for funding should be submitted to Natural Resources Conservation Service State Offices by April 27, 2007. Eligible entities include nonprofits and for-profit organizations, small businesses, Native American tribal governments, and state and local governments. Under the FRPP, NRCS may provide up to 50 percent of the cost of an easement in perpetuity to keep land in agricultural uses. There is a funding limit of \$4 million for an individual award. For a copy of the FY2007 funding notice and additional information, see the NRCS FRPP website at www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/frpp/.

Meeting with NRCS on Air Quality Task Force: On Tuesday, Martha Noble joined representatives from environmental organizations at meeting with Lawrence Clark, NRCS Deputy Chief of Science and Technology, and other NRCS staff with responsibilities for the NRCS Agricultural Air Quality Task Force. The Environmental Integrity Project organized the meeting to discuss issues raised in a sign-on letter to NRCS about the Task Force, which serves as an advisory committee to USDA on agricultural air quality issues. The letter criticized USDA for imbalance on the Task Force, noting that it was weighted heavily with agribusiness interests. NRCS staff responded that the federal EPA representative and a new representative from the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality are regarded by NRCS as representing the interests of environmental groups – a position roundly criticized by the all the organizations at the meeting. The letter also criticized the task force for its focus on policy issues and recommendations which are not included in the Task Force Charter. NRCS noted that it had disbanded a policy subcommittee of the Task Force and would try to direct the Task Force to work on agricultural air quality research needs. The next Task Force meeting is scheduled for May 8-10 in San Diego.

RMA Non-Insurance RFA: On Monday, USDA's Risk Management Agency issued a request for applications for its Non-Insurance Risk Management Program Partnerships. Some \$3 million in funds will be awarded for projects to develop tools to assist farmers manage risk. Eligible projects include developing a risk management tool designed to increase knowledge of and participation in existing insurance programs, but the tool cannot be part of the insurance policy or plan of insurance. The tool should, at a minimum, be designed to assist producers who purchase one or more of the following products: Pasture, Rangeland, Forage Pilot; Livestock insurance; or Adjusted Gross Revenue Pilot and Adjusted Gross Revenue-Lite. Questions may be forwarded to Kristin Chow at 816-926-6343 or email at RMA.Research.Application@rma.usda.gov. Proposals are due by May 17. The RFA and application package is available at www.rma.usda.gov.

DULY NOTED

Chairman Peterson on Local Foods: House Ag Committee Chair Collin Peterson participated in a full day event on local foods as an economic and agricultural development tool earlier this week in Morris, MN. A press account by Tom Larson of the Morris Sun Tribune, with quotes from the Chairman as well

as Land Stewardship Project's Terry Vanderpol (our Marketing and Rural Development Committee co-chair) can be found at www.morrissuntribune.com [local food article](#).

Economic Research Service Website on the Farm Bill: USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) has established a website which gathers together ERS research and analysis on farm bill issues. The new website is <http://151.121.68.30/Features/FarmBill2007/>. Note that ERS is working on the website this weekend and it will not be available until 2 pm EDT on Sunday April 8.

New Intern On Board at SAC: The next time you call the SAC office and hear an unfamiliar voice on the other end of the line, chances are good you are speaking with Zach Baker, SAC's newest intern. Zach is a recent graduate of Tufts University where he studied Political Science and Community Health and was involved in several organizing and childhood obesity-prevention projects in Boston and in California. In addition to working in the SAC office, Zach will be managing the Silver Spring farmers' market in Maryland. Welcome Zach!