



NATIONAL GRANGE

OF THE ORDER OF PATRONS OF HUSBANDRY

American Values. Hometown Roots.

View from the Hill



POLICY UPDATES and ISSUE NEWS

SEPTEMBER 2023 WRAP-UP

WASHINGTON OVERVIEW

Washington is seriously preparing for a federal government shutdown at 12:01 am Sunday morning as a result of Congress's inability to pass a budget for the next fiscal year which begins October 1. The Senate has passed all its appropriations bills, a short-term continuing Resolution (CR), and seems determined to avoid a shutdown. The House is attempting last-minute passage of its appropriations bills, but most observers are skeptical. Speaker McCarthy may have to turn to Democrats for the votes he needs to pass a clean CR to fund the government at current spending levels for several months. But that could put his Speakership in jeopardy from members of his own party. Former President Trump is skipping Republican presidential debates while waiting on several court dates. President Biden is suffering from slipping poll numbers and family legal matters. Economists are arguing whether our economy is or is not doing well. The U.S.-Mexico border is a mess, prompting calls from both parties on the Hill to stem the immigrant flow. Senate Majority Leader Schumer relaxed the dress code for the Senate floor to accommodate Senator Fetterman (D-PA) and created a firestorm from both parties. Senate Joe Manchin (D-W.VA.) circulated a bipartisan resolution among Senate colleagues to restore the dress code. The Senate then voted overwhelmingly in bipartisan fashion to require business attire to be worn on the Senate floor and in Senate chambers.

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

Farm Bill Timeline Keeps Slipping

The current farm bill is set to expire at midnight tomorrow, September 30 with no new legislation in sight to authorize a new farm bill for the next five years. But because 2023 crops are covered by the expiring farm bill, there's no rush in Congress to move a new farm bill quickly. Several sections (SNAP, commodity supports, conservation programs, crop insurance) are in statute as permanent legislation for mandatory spending regardless of congressional appropriations through the end of the calendar year. Commodity prices in general are good right now so producers have not been pushing lawmakers for immediate action on the commodity title. However, members of the agriculture committees are acutely aware that authorization for these titles expire at the end of December. Without new legislation, that's when Depression-era laws governing commodity supports kick in which would cause chaos in the markets. The 2018 farm bill passed in December, three months after the prior bill expired. The three farm bills before that each passed in the year following their original deadline.

Six Trends Shaping the Future Structure of Agriculture

Aimpoint Research has done extensive work to analyze current agriculture trends and identify the ag producer of the future. Aimpoint's six forces driving future agriculture transformation are:

- Consolidation - By 2040, there will be fewer than 100,000 production farms, and 5 percent of farms will produce 75 percent of agriculture output.
- Farmer psychology – More farmers may be unwilling or unable to stay in business if current economic conditions continue. Operating profitability is declining, and 60 percent of farmers are concerned about their ability to repay operating loans.
- Technology – When young people interested in agriculture were asked what excited them most, it was technology. While they have appreciation for the lifestyle of their parents and grandparents, they intend to do things differently by integrating new technology.
- Consumers – Consumer decision-making revolves around price, healthiness, freshness and perception. Consumers perceive non-GMO is better than GMO, and that organic is better than non-organic. Locally produced foods and plant-based diets also come into play.
- Markets – South America is likely to become the breadbasket of the future. This will put American farmers in a tougher competitive environment.
- Government – There are ongoing concerns about trade, labor and regulatory overreach. Most growers believe federal regulations have generally been harmful to agriculture.

AG WORKFORCE

USDA Launches Ag Labor Assistance Program

Agricultural employers can now apply for competitive grants to help recruit H-2A workers and improve working conditions. The Farm Labor Stabilization and Protection Pilot Program will provide \$65 million in grants to employers of all sizes to recruit and retain workers, improve working conditions, and facilitate lawful migration pathways. The National Council of Agricultural Employers says it supports the pilot program.

CONSERVATION and ENVIRONMENT

Biden Administration Announces Creation of Climate Corps

The American Climate Corps aims to train young people in clean energy conservation and climate resilience skills while creating good paying jobs. Patterned after the New Deal-era Civilian Conservation Corps, plans are to recruit 20,000 people for apprenticeships in wildland firefighting, building renewable energy projects, and restoring coastal wetlands.

HEALTH CARE

Vaccine Access for Underserved Populations

The National Grange joined 56 patient and pharmacy groups to urge Health and Human Services Secretary Becerra to remove barriers to access for antiviral treatments for underserved populations. Many areas of rural America are part of the underserved demographic. The potential for a “triple-demic” is real with a convergence of COVID-19, influenza, and RSV breaking out across the country. Burdensome requirements pharmacists must follow to access the Health Partner Order Portal need to be removed to allow for the efficient and speedy shipment of these immunizations to underserved residents.

Pharmacy Benefit Manager Reform Legislation

The National Grange, joined by 30 patient groups, pharmacists, unions and disease organizations, sent the House Health Subcommittee leadership a strong letter of support for Protecting Patients Against PBM Abuse Act (H.R. 2880). Today, three PBM corporations control 80% of prescription drug sales and have merged with the nation's three largest health insurers. PBMs negotiate large volume discounts from drug manufacturers but do not pass these savings on to plan sponsors or patients. The Grange has called for PBM reform for a long time.

Modernize the Prescription Process

The Grange's Burton Eller was featured in an opinion editorial in Washington's *Real Clear Policy* newsletter. Eller highlighted the need to transform the way pharmacists receive prescribing information from drug manufacturers by allowing it to be done electronically. Today the paper booklets pharmacists and doctors receive can take 8-12 months to print and ship. Digital information can be updated with the latest real-time information to the health care professional. The patient will continue to receive printed prescription information and a doctor or pharmacist can still request the paper booklets. So far, 22 bipartisan members of the House are supporting this effort.

The Ambulance May Not be on the Way

In rural areas where hospitals have shuttered, the surviving facilities are long drives away. The Maine Rural Health Research Center has documented coverage gaps in the availability of ambulance services across the country. The researchers termed these areas "ambulance deserts" where people live more than 25 minutes from the nearest ambulance station. In the 42 states for which data was available, 4.5 million people live in an ambulance desert.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Extend the Affordable Connectivity Program

The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) will run out of funds provided by the Infrastructure and Jobs Act in early 2024. In general, ACP provides eligible households \$30 per month toward internet bills plus \$100 to buy computers. The program has been a successful incentive for low-income rural families to connect to the internet. The National Grange joined the Rural and Agriculture Council of America on a letter to Congress in preparation for a House Energy and Commerce Committee hearing. The Grange urged Congress to extend ACP funding to allow more rural families to access the internet and allow those already on the program to continue while Congress and internet providers seek a more permanent funding solution.

Preserve AM Radio in Vehicles

The National Grange, several farm and rural groups, and the National Association of Farm Broadcasters are urging Congress to enact the AM Radio for Every Vehicle Act (S. 1668, H.R. 3413). Some electric vehicle manufacturers are already eliminating AM radio from these models. The Emergency Alert System depends on AM radio. AM broadcasting offers residents struggling with poor or non-existent cellular and broadband coverage a chance to stay connected. Farmers and ranchers depend on AM radio for information about weather, markets, ag news, ag commentary, and local events. There are 4,470 AM stations across the country and over a third of these stations broadcast agricultural programming.

OF INTEREST

Trust a Farmer

The values of integrity, honesty and care seen in agriculture offer a model for achieving sustainable progress in society and industry. Farmers and ranchers are the heart of this truth says Jim Britt, president of the Communications Officers of State Departments of Agriculture. What makes agriculture an environment of integrity? The answer lies in the engrained nature of the profession according to Britt. Farmers cannot afford to disregard facts or ignore reality. Doing so would lead to crop failure, economic disaster and hunger. Their symbiotic relationship with nature fosters humility, and honesty - values that could be a much-needed remedy for today's society.

PERSPECTIVE

“ Life on a farm is a school of patience; you can't hurry the crops or make an ox in two days. ~ **Henri Alain Liogier** ”

“ When man learns to understand and control his own behavior as well as he is learning to understand and control the behavior of crop plants and domestic animals, he may be justified in believing he has become civilized. ~ **Ayn Rand** ”

“ Our neighbor's crop is always more fruitful, and his cattle produce more milk than our own. ~ **Ovid** ”

“ By using modern technologies, today's farmers grow more crops on the same amount land, using less plowing and pesticides, and feeding more people. ~ **Zippy Duval** ”

A promotional banner for a Grange Apparel Flash Sale. The background is a solid blue color. On the left, four people (two men and two women) are standing and wearing various Grange-branded clothing items: a light blue dress shirt, a white and grey vest, a grey vest, and a light blue polo shirt. On the right, there are three items: a dark blue messenger bag, a light yellow polo shirt, and a dark blue polo shirt. The text 'Grange Apparel Flash Sale!' is written in large, white, bold letters at the top. Below it, 'Order by September 30' is written in smaller white text. At the bottom right, the website address 'grange.biz/grangeapparel' is written in white, underlined text.

Available for a limited time - Grange-branded apparel! Have you ever wanted the Grange emblem embroidered on a polo, dress shirt, vest, or bag? Now's your chance! Items will be delivered to the National Grange Convention in Niagara in November. If you cannot attend, we will arrange to have your items delivered. Order through September 30th at <http://grange.biz/grangeapparel>