



NATIONAL GRANGE

OF THE ORDER OF PATRONS OF HUSBANDRY

American Values. Hometown Roots.

View from the Hill



POLICY UPDATES and ISSUE NEWS

JULY 2023 WRAP-UP

WASHINGTON OVERVIEW

Lawmakers in Washington are heading home (and abroad) for their traditional August recess and will return to the nation's capital on September 12. They leave with most of the heavy legislative lifting waiting for action. The majority of the annual appropriations bills are still in committee. The President has threatened to veto the House USDA/FDA appropriations bill if it cuts domestic spending to levels below those agreed upon with Speaker McCarthy in earlier budget negotiations. Xochiti Tores Small, a former congresswoman from New Mexico and the granddaughter of farm workers, has been sworn in as USDA's new deputy secretary. USDA plans to begin hearings in August on the conflicting proposals from milk producers and dairy processors for modifying pricing formulas under the federal milk marketing order system. The New Hampshire "first in the nation" presidential primary season has begun. Former Vice President Mike Pence held a town hall style meeting at the WicWas Lake Grange in Meredith, N.H. Look for President Biden and Vice President Harris to shift into campaign mode focusing on race, rights and the economy while Congress is on recess leaving the press looking for political news. Former President Trump's legal issues and the Biden family's influence peddling allegations are fueling speculation of third-party candidates entering the fray.

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

USDA Targets Anticompetitive Acts

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has joined 31 states to target price-fixing and other anticompetitive behavior in the food and agriculture sectors. USDA's partnership with the bipartisan group of states attorneys general will focus on antitrust enforcement and concerns about price fixing and gouging.

Foreign Land Ownership Targeted

Senators Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) have introduced the Farmland Security Act of 2023 to further boost transparency in foreign ownership of U.S. farmland. The bill would require greater transparency for foreign purchases of U.S. ag land, impose stronger penalties for reporting non-compliance, and mandate USDA to audit a minimum of 10% of foreign land ownership reports annually. Then, just before adjourning for their August recess, the Senate overwhelmingly voted 91-7 to bar investors from China, Russia, North Korea and Iran from buying more than small amounts of U.S. farmland. The measure also adds USDA as an ex officio member of the Committee on Foreign Investment in the U. S.

CONSERVATION and ENVIRONMENT

USDA to Improve Greenhouse Gas Emissions Accounting

The agriculture community is applauding USDA's plan to improve greenhouse gas emissions accounting and reporting, including the launch of a national soil carbon monitoring network and updated conservation practice standards. The goal is to improve measurement, monitoring, reporting, and verification of greenhouse gas emissions. Producers support climate policies that are voluntary, market-based, and scientifically sound.

HEALTH CARE

Mental Health and Addiction Top the List of Rural Health Concerns

For the last 20 years, health care access has been the biggest concern of rural stakeholders, according to surveys conducted by the Southwest Rural Health Resource Center. But the latest polling puts mental health as the top rural health issue and addiction ranks number two. Survey participants included health care workers, public administrators, educators and more. Surprisingly, the rankings were the same across all ages, races, occupations and regions of the country. Rounding out the top ten rural health care concerns are access to and quality of health care, weight and obesity, drug and alcohol abuse, nutrition and healthy eating, older adults, preventive care, diabetes, and economic stability. As Grange members have noted, the National Grange has partnered with Jeff Winton's Rural Minds to elevate the rural mental health movement, provide the platform to spotlight personal stories, raise awareness, share best practices, and engage participation and support. Grange members and guests can hear Jeff Winton and his staff at the National Grange convention this November in Niagara Falls, New York. In addition, the National Grange, Rural Minds and New York Farm Net will co-present a moderated panel featuring cross-generational participants from the Silent Generation to GenZ. The three organizations will also present a workshop about rural mental health first aid and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's "Talk Saves Lives" program.

Ag 24-Hour Crisis Helpline Needed

The National Grange is working with Senators Baldwin (D-WI), Ernst (R-IA) and Gillibrand (D-NY) as well as Representatives Caraveo (D-CO-8) and Finstad (R-MN-1) to establish a 24-hour crisis helpline staffed by trained and experienced professionals who come from rural communities or are familiar with Rural, farming and ranching culture. The helpline would be an expansion of the Farm and Ranch Stress Network first authorized in the last farm bill.

Support for Early Cancer Detection

A total of 1,592 letters went from the National Grange headquarters in Washington to members of Congress and their staff members in support of the Medicare Multi-Cancer Early Detection Screening Coverage Act in both the House and Senate. The Act would require Medicare to pay for a new procedure that is capable of detecting many types of cancers with a simple blood draw in the early stages of the cancer's development. In the letters, the Grange referenced its recent survey that found cancer deaths in rural areas are 14% higher than urban areas and late-stage diagnoses of lung and colon cancers are significantly higher in rural communities. Detecting cancer early means more treatment options and higher success rates.

Rural Health Caucus Launched

Representatives Dana Harshbarger (R-TN-1) and Jill Tokuda (D-HI-2) have announced formation of the Congressional Bipartisan Rural Health Caucus. It will provide a forum for members of Congress to advocate for legislation and action that help increase access to quality, affordable health care and mental health services for all rural residents.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Prioritize Broadband for Rural West Virginians

The Charleston Gazette-Mail published a letter to the editor from National Grange president Betsy Huber highlighting West Virginia's need for the Broadband Equity and Deployment (BEAD) Program and the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) to finally close the rural digital divide in the state. BEAD supports broadband accessibility and ACP ensures affordability for eligible families with a monthly subsidy. However, funding for the ACP is expected to run out by March 2024 and the National Grange is urging Congress to extend the program in order to reach the 30% of the state's rural households and businesses currently lacking adequate broadband access.

ACP Helps 21st Century Rural Communities Thrive

The Washington newsletter *RealClearPolicy* published an op ed by National Grange president Betsy Huber that called upon Congress to finish closing the country's digital divide. In establishing the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), Congress recognized that millions of Americans still face financial challenges to obtaining broadband connectivity. Huber called upon Congress to extend funding for ACP in order to connect hard-to-reach high-cost rural households and businesses across the country.

OF INTEREST

Commodity Checkoff Opponents Eye Farm Bill

Commodity checkoffs are programs established by agriculture producers and operated under the supervision of USDA that are responsible for promotion and marketing the commodities they represent and for conducting research into the expanded use of those commodities. Checkoff programs can be established or dismantled through producer referendums. These programs have always been tangled in politics. Proponents argue that the research, promotion and marketing efforts they fund are important to keeping producers competitive. Opponents say they question whether the money from mandatory fees producers pay is spent properly. New restrictions on checkoff programs have been proposed in the Opportunities for Fairness in Farming (OFF) Act introduced by Senators Mike Lee (R-UT) and Cory Booker (D-NJ) along with Representatives Nancy Mace (R-SC-1) and Dina Titus (D-NV-1). OFF would prohibit contracting research and promotion work to organizations that lobby Congress or federal agencies, require checkoff programs to publish their budgets, require contracts to describe the goods and services provided, and require periodic audits by the General Accountability Office and USDA's inspector general. Most of the proposed requirements proposed in the OFF Act are covered by current law governing checkoff programs. The exception is the prohibition for checkoff boards to contract research and promotion work to organizations that also lobby Congress or federal agencies. This provision could cause sparks to fly during the upcoming farm bill debate. The 22 current checkoff programs represent a diverse mix of products from blueberries to cotton to milk to Christmas trees and are all funded through mandatory fees paid by the producers of each commodity.

PERSPECTIVE

“ I have a love affair with tomatoes and corn. I remember them from my childhood. I only had them in the summer. They were extraordinary. ~ **Alice Waters** ”

“ I know my corn plants, and I find it a great pleasure to know them. ~ **Barbara McClintock** ”

“ I have no hostility to nature, but a child's love to it. I expand and live in the warm day like corn and melons. ~ **Ralph Waldo Emerson** ”

“ The Christian is like the ripening corn, the riper he grows, the more lowly he bows his head. ~ **Alfred Bertram Guthrie** ”

GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY IN ACTION AWARD



*submit a minimum one-page written description
of your Grange's grassroots advocacy action
along with at least one photo*

Deadline: September 1

More information: bit.ly/23ngadvocacy