

AG ISSUES UPDATE

Edited by Brad Hollabaugh
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USDA to Start Work on GMO Labeling Standards

Now that President Barack Obama has signed a bill calling for the establishment of biotechnology labeling on food products, regulators are starting the task of writing those standards. The new law requires the U.S. Department of Agriculture to establish food labeling standards for products with ingredients derived by biotechnology such as genetically modified organisms (GMOs). While the bill will require mandatory disclosure, it preempts state-by-state labeling laws, which could have caused higher food prices and consumer confusion.

Officials at the USDA have started laying the framework for establishing those labeling standards. That process will have several opportunities for public input, said Andrew Walmsley, director of Congressional relations for the American Farm Bureau Federation. Farm Bureau will be providing comments to the USDA, he said.

"We will see the USDA move pretty quickly on this before the administration change," he said. "The USDA has started the regulatory process, and they have a working group together that is examining the law and determining the next steps."

The law, which received bipartisan support, gives food companies several choices for how to label GMO products, including a symbol, a digital link or electronic disclosure through technology such as quick response (Q.R.) codes that consumers can scan with smartphones.

FSMA: FDA Announces Availability of Draft Guidance

On August 25, 2016, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) published notice in the Federal Register of the availability of three Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) draft guidance for industry documents. First, FDA published draft guidance #235 entitled: Current Good Manufacturing Practice Requirements for Food for Animals to help food facilities "determine whether and how they need to comply with the current good manufacturing practice requirements of the Current Good Manufacturing Practice, Hazard Analysis, and Risk-Based Preventive Controls for Food for Animals final rule" (81 FR 58519).

Second, FDA published draft guidance for industry #239 entitled: Human Food By-Products for Use as Animal Food to help food facilities that manufacture, process, pack, or hold human food for consumption in the United States, determine and follow the requirements for their human food by-products for use as animal food (81 FR 58521).

Third, FDA published draft guidance for industry entitled: Classification of Activities as Harvesting, Packing, Holding, or Manufacturing/Processing for Farms and Facilities; Draft Guidance for Industry, to "help food establishments determine whether the activities that they perform are within the 'farm' definition established [under FDA's] regulation for Registration of Food Facilities" (81 FR 58421). *Source: The Agricultural Law Brief, 09/07/2016*

USApple Pegs 2016 Crop at 246 Million Bushels

Apple growers and industry experts attending USApple's annual Apple Crop Outlook & Marketing Conference in Chicago evaluated the prospects for the 2016 apple crop in regional discussion groups and came up with an estimate of 246.0 million 42 pound units (bushels), slightly less than

the August 12 USDA estimate of 248.0 million bushels. USApple's forecasted 2016 crop is three percent more than the 2015 crop of 238.2 million bushels and three percent more than the five year average.

Not long ago, a crop of this size would have been greeted with concern by the industry, but continually improving quality of the fresh fruit by growers coupled with stronger and more effective marketing by packer/shippers and marketers have proved that crops of this size can be managed and marketed profitably. Given the recent track record of the industry in handling larger crops, there is good reason for optimism regarding the 2016 crop.

The 2016 Production & Utilization Analysis is available for purchase. This report provides U.S. varietal estimates, processing vs. fresh market utilization forecasts, and an international market outlook. The report is available to members at the discounted rate of \$150. Simply email Jessa Allen to request a copy. *Apple Bites - 9.8.16, Staff Contact: Mark Seetin*

Two from Apple Industry Appointed to USDA Advisory Committee

USApple past chairman Mark Nicholson, Red Jacket Orchards, Geneva, NY was recently appointed to serve for two years as a member of the USDA Fruit and Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee. Also reappointed to another two-year term is current member Diane Smith, executive director of the Michigan Apple Committee. Committee members represent viewpoints of the fruit and vegetable industry to help develop recommendations for the Agriculture Secretary's consideration. Nicholson and Smith's nominations were strongly supported by their respective U.S. Senators and USApple. A meeting of the committee is scheduled for October 25-26, 2016, in Washington, DC.

Drones Ready to Fly for Agriculture

The Federal Aviation Administration released its final rule for small unmanned aircraft, commonly known as drones, which will pave the way for their use commercially. Drones have a number of practical applications for farmers including crop scouting and monitoring.

"Drones have the potential to provide farmers and ranchers with more timely and detailed scouting information," said RJ Karney, director of Congressional relations for the American Farm Bureau Federation. "It also allows farmers to catch potential problems before they develop into catastrophic issues, and thereby optimizing yields, lowering the environmental impact and also providing greater efficiency."

The FFA rules will allow commercial operators to charge for using drones as part of agriculture. The FFA has also developed rules for operators of drones, including the height they are allowed to fly, hours of operation and privacy concerns. Farm Bureau is working with FAA officials on developing a webinar that will allow farmers to ask questions of the FAA and gain a greater understanding of the rules surrounding drone usage.

State Places 34 Counties Under Drought Watch/Warning

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection has declared that 34 counties are facing drought condition due to dry weather and high temperatures.

DEP officials said 33 counties are under drought watch, while Potter County has been listed as under a drought warning. The hot weather and lack of rainfall has resulted in low stream flows and reduced groundwater levels. There's been a rainfall deficit of as much as 6 inches throughout June and July, DEP officials said.

“A number of public water systems have already instituted voluntary and mandatory water restrictions to preserve their drinking water supplies,” DEP Acting Secretary Patrick McDonnell said.

A drought watch calls for a voluntary 5 percent reduction in non-essential water use. A drought warning calls for a voluntary 10-15 percent reduction in water usage. Drought emergencies can result in mandatory restrictions in non-essential water usage.

Penn State Completing Work on Chesapeake Bay Survey

Penn State Extension is wrapping up work on a survey that examined the best management practices used by farmers in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. The survey, supported by Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, is the first attempt to accurately measure the amount of BMPs employed by farmers throughout the watershed. Survey results will be shared with state and federal regulators as part of the Environmental Protection Agency’s Chesapeake Bay cleanup plan.

Pennsylvania Farm Bureau believes the EPA has inaccurately counted the number of conservation practices followed by farmers in a model it developed to measure the impacts nutrients are having on water quality. Surveys were sent out earlier this year by the Penn State Survey Research Center. Nearly 7,000 farmers responded. Now, Extension educators from Penn State are visiting roughly 700 farms to verify practices are being followed. Penn State expected to complete those verification visits in August.

Survey data, including the results of verification visits, will be confidential and will not be associated with a farmer’s name or location, said James Shortle, a Penn State researcher leading the survey.

“The results reported to the Department of Environmental Protection will be provided in summary form and will not include any names or locations of survey participants,” he said. “All inventory and farm visit results will be permanently anonymized to prevent identification of respondents.”

When the EPA established its model as part of the Chesapeake Bay cleanup plan, it only counted BMPs that were paid for through cost-share. That ignores the numerous voluntary practices employed by farmers. PFB believes the survey results completed by Penn State will paint a more accurate picture of the steps farmers have taken to prevent soil loss and protect water quality.

Taking A Regional Approach to Agriculture Workforce Development

It’s no secret that agriculture is a growing career field. But at the same time, many sectors of agriculture are facing a shortage of qualified workers—from equipment technicians to herd managers—who can step into those vacant positions. Officials in Northwestern Pennsylvania are trying to take a regional-based approach to examine what agriculture will need to find qualified workers now and in the future.

Albert “Chip” Abramovic, a Venango County Commissioner and Farm Bureau member, is organizing a committee of agriculture businesses and farmers to talk about workforce development and potential solutions. Abramovic, who serves on the regional Northwest Workforce Investment Board, said he has noticed a lack of specific workforce training for agriculture workers. And that seems to be a common theme around the state when talking with other county commissioners. Abramovic said he wants to make sure every portion of agriculture is represented when talking about workforce development, from seed sales to timber harvest.

“When I bring up this topic, some people assume we are just talking about milking and cutting hay. Agriculture is a lot more than that,” he said. “I want to make sure we have the golf courses represented, the wine industry, farms, timber companies and equipment dealers. I want to make sure the whole process from start to finish is represented.”

Eventually, Abramovic wants to start an Agriculture Workforce Council made up of counties in Northwestern Pennsylvania. That could open up the possibility of grant dollars dedicated to worker training, he said. But the first step is getting a committee together of various sectors of the agriculture economy to discuss needs and solutions.

After initial meetings, Abramovic said he wants to forward that information to state officials to identify solutions and develop a roadmap of how to deliver agriculture specific workforce development on a regional approach. Regional, rather than statewide, solutions make sense for agriculture because different regions of the state have commodity-specific needs, Abramovic said. Abramovic said he hopes to start meeting with agriculture businesses leaders this fall to start the process of establishing the Agriculture Workforce Council.

Pennsylvania Hits Another Farmland Preservation Milestone

Pennsylvania has hit another milestone in preserving farmland by enrolling its 5,000th farm in the nation’s leading land preservation program. The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture added 26 new farms to the state’s Farmland Preservation Program, bringing the total number of farms enrolled to 5,003.

Agriculture officials celebrated with an event in Bird-in-Hand, Lancaster County, on one of the farms recently enrolled. Since the program began in 1988, the state has preserved 525,000 acres of farmland. “Preserving Pennsylvania’s best farmland is an investment in our heritage, in our economy, in our ability to sustain ourselves, and in our environment,” said Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding.

Pennsylvania is also increasing the amount of funding it will use for farmland preservation in the coming fiscal year. The state’s latest budget gave an additional \$5 million for farmland preservation from cigarette tax revenue. It brings the total funding for farmland preservation to \$36 million.

New Apple Variety Resists Browning

New apple varieties which include Arctic Fuji, Arctic Granny and Arctic Golden have been developed to resist browning from biting, bruising or cutting and are scheduled to be on the market by the fall of 2017. The non-browning trait has been produced through biotechnology. The USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service has determined these varieties of apples offer the same safety for consumers as conventional apples. The new varieties of Arctic apples will increase consumption and reduce waste.

New Source of Information for High and Low Tunnel Berry (and Other) Growers

Thanks to receiving a multi-state Specialty Crops Research Initiative grant, research and extension activities related to high and low tunnel berry production are taking a significant step forward. The project, led by Eric Hanson at Michigan State University, coordinates a considerable amount of work on high tunnel berry production taking place at a number of institutions including Penn State.

Visit the [Tunnel Berries.org](http://TunnelBerries.org) project web site where you can find out more about the project and obtain information on sources and manufacturers of high and low tunnels, different brands of plastics, production of berries in both tunnels and the field, and plastics recycling efforts. There are links to videos on many of the above topics, and more information is being added as time goes on. Please check the web site out, and feel free to submit any comments and suggestions for improvement. *Source: Penn State Extension*

Allegheny County Educator Named Teacher of the Year

Lisa Klipa returned from her first Educator's Ag Institute with a renewed focus.

Klipa, who teaches at a private Christian school in Allegheny County, scrapped her previous classroom theme after attending the institute in 2015. Instead, she converted her theme for her fourth-grade students to agriculture and incorporated a number of lesson plans that she learned at the institute.

Klipa's dedication to promoting agriculture education led her to being named the 2016 Teacher of the Year by the Pennsylvania Friends of Agriculture Foundation, which organizes the institute. As part of the award, Klipa will have the chance to attend the 2017 National Ag In the Classroom Conference.

Students in Klipa's class had the chance to adopt a calf, and receive updates through the farmer about the calf's development. In addition, students learned about the PA Preferred program, traced their Easter meal back to a farm and developed a schoolwide poll about favorite farm animals. Klipa said it was the resources provided at the Educator's Ag Institute that made lesson planning so easy.

"I integrated agriculture into our existing curriculum very easily," she said. "The information and supplies I got from the AG Institute were great resources to reinforce my existing lessons."

The biggest lesson that Klipa wanted her students to understand is the source of their food, and help realize the work that goes into getting food into grocery stores and restaurants. In addition, she specifically taught lessons on local foods, using the PA Preferred program and trips to nearby farms.