

AG ISSUES UPDATE
Edited by Brad Hollabaugh
April 2017

Apple Leaders Make Mark in Washington, DC

On March 23, apple leaders from a dozen states gathered in Washington, DC for USApple's Capitol Hill day. Participants included veteran apple advocates, first timers and seventeen young apple leaders (YALs). Washington Congressman Dave Reichert addressed the group at the kick off breakfast, providing updates on agriculture labor and trade issues. Reichert is a member of the powerful House Ways and Means Committee where he chairs the Subcommittee on Trade.

Attendees advocated for the USApple legislative priorities as determined by the Government Affairs Committee in January. Agriculture labor, H-2A issues, and concerns about increased enforcement topped the agenda followed by trade and the upcoming Farm Bill. *Staff Contact: Diane Kurrle, Apple Bites - 4.5.17*

Agriculture Groups Write Trump

Late last month, USApple worked with the members of the Agriculture Workforce Coalition (AWC) Steering Committee to send a letter to President Trump in response to his remarks on immigration to the joint session of Congress. President Trump stated, "I believe real and positive reform is possible, as long as we focus on the following goals: to improve jobs and wages for Americans, to strengthen our nation's security, and to restore respect for our laws." We let the President know that we found these words to be "encouraging" and that "we stand ready to help."

The AWC letter summarizes the importance of maintaining the current workforce and fixing the broken H-2A guestworker program. We made the strong case that agriculture's "contribution to the U.S. economy and American jobs fall in line with your comments." In addition to the steering committee members a total of 70 agricultural organizations signed the letter. *Staff Contact: Diane Kurrle, Apple Bites - 4.5.17*

EPA Denies Petition to Remove Chlorpyrifos from Market - Science Cited in Decision

On March 30, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) denied an activist organization's petition to remove an important crop protection product, chlorpyrifos, from the market. Claims in the petition were based on unreliable information. Agricultural organizations active on the chlorpyrifos issue are hopeful that EPA's decision to deny the petition may indicate the agency is returning pesticide policies that are transparent and based on sound science.

Apple growers use chlorpyrifos to control the Rosy Apple Aphid, San Jose Scale, and the Woolly Apple Aphid. Because chlorpyrifos does less harm to beneficial insects, it is widely used as part of an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program. USApple was an active participant in several industry coalitions urging the EPA to return to the science-based process that is required under law. The decision by the agency to deny the petition based

upon the science is a hopeful sign that science is once again at the center of the evaluation process. *Staff Contact: Mark Seetin, Apple Bites - 4.5.17*

Trump Budget Slashes EPA, Calls for Agriculture Cuts

A budget proposal from President Donald Trump calls for significant cuts in the Environmental Protection Agency—including funding for Chesapeake Bay Cleanup efforts—along with a 20 percent cut in spending for the Department of Agriculture. While the President has proposed a budget, it will be up to Congress to craft the federal government's spending plan. Federal agencies are currently operating under a continuing resolution which carries spending through April 28.

Trump, in his budget blueprint, said he is prioritizing spending on defense and homeland security—including a 10 percent increase in military spending. Those spending increases will be offset by \$54 billion in cuts in other agencies and federal spending, Trump said.

Among the cuts proposed to the EPA are \$427 million in funding used for cleanup efforts in the Chesapeake Bay and Great Lakes. Instead, the administration wants to see responsibility for funding cleanup plans returned to state and local governments. All told, the budget proposal cuts 50 EPA programs.

Within the Department of Agriculture, the budget proposal will fund research through Extension and land-grant universities, including \$350 million in competitive grants. At the same time, it cuts funding for USDA statistical services, except money needed to complete the next Agriculture Census. It also eliminates the Water and Wastewater loan program, and reduces staffing in USDA Service Center agencies. Farm Bureau will be working with Congress to discuss agriculture priorities in the next federal budget.

NRCS Seeks Grant Proposals for Chesapeake Bay Conservation

The Natural Resources Conservation Service is seeking grant proposals for \$3 million in funding available for projects that address conservation practices in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Projects funded through the grant program will promote nutrient reduction the bay watershed. NRCS is accepting proposals from governmental and non-governmental organizations, along with individuals.

NRCS will award up to \$500,000 per projects between one and three years in length. Grants will fund projects that prevent soil loss, reduce legacy sediments or make public-private investments in working lands conservation. Grant proposals must be submitted by June 5. For more information, including how to apply, contact Noel Soto at 717.237.2173, or noel.soto@pa.usda.gov.

NRCS Makes Funding Available for High Tunnels

The Natural Resource Conservation Service is making funding available for Pennsylvania farmers to install high tunnel systems. Money is being made available through the Agricultural Management Assistance program, which was authorized as part of the 2014 Farm Bill. Funding can be used for high tunnel systems and related costs, such as irrigation and erosion control. Producers have until April 21 to apply for funding. Funding is

competitive, with the highest priority given to urban and suburban areas. Producers may receive an incentive payment based on the average cost for installing conservation practices. Farmers must have a conservation plan in place before the application can be considered for funding. For more information, visit: www.pa.nrcs.usda.gov.

Farmers Calling on Congress for Tax Reform

Farmers are asking Congress to support comprehensive tax reform that gives them the freedom to grow, but also adapt quickly to changes beyond their control. Pat Wolff, senior director of congressional relations for the American Farm Bureau Federation, testified in a hearing before the House Agriculture Committee that farmers need a tax code that supports high-risk, and capital intensive businesses like farms.

“Running a farm or ranch business is challenging under the best of circumstances,” Wolff said. “Farmers and ranchers need a tax code that recognizes the unique financial challenges that impact them.”

Areas like reduced income taxes, reduced capital gains taxes, immediate business expenses and repeal of estate taxes would be a step in the right direction, Wolff said. Farmers also need the flexibility of stepped-up basis, cash accounting and like-kind exchanges, she said. Farmers need to be able to recover capital investments and put their money back to work on the farm, Wolff said.

“Farming is a cyclical business where a period of prosperity can be followed by one or more years of low prices, poor yields or even weather disaster,” she said.

Apple Growers to Vote on New Program Order

Pennsylvania apple growers are expected to vote on a new Apple Program order through a referendum that is open through April 18. Ballots were mailed in late March to all qualified growers, defined as those with 500 or more apple trees. All ballots must be postmarked no later than April 18 and received by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture by April 21.

If approved, the new Pennsylvania Apple Program will replace the current Pennsylvania Apple Marketing Program, which is set to expire May 26, following a vote that growers took to discontinue the program.

The new program would assess a rate of \$0.05 per bushel for fresh apples and \$0.01 per bushel for processed apple. If approved, the program would generate an estimated revenue of between \$200,000 and \$250,000, with funding used for research, consumer education and related administrative costs.

The program would be led by a seven-person board. Growers with questions are encouraged to contact a current board member, a list of which can be found at: pennsylvaniaapples.org/about/board-staff/.

PFB Website Provides Answers to Transportation Questions

Farmers with questions about moving agriculture vehicles on roadways, or related questions, can visit www.pfb.com/transportation to get numerous answers on transportation issues. Copies of Pennsylvania Farm Bureau's updated transportation booklet can be downloaded from this sight. Transportation laws governing the various types of agriculture equipment and vehicles are often complicated. That's why Pennsylvania Farm Bureau has put together a comprehensive document to give farmers the resources they need when faced with questions about agriculture transportation.

Farmers Advocate in Harrisburg

More than 350 farmers from across the state spent the day in Harrisburg advocating on several priority agriculture issues, including the state budget, and pension and property tax reform. Pennsylvania Farm Bureau's State Legislative Conference is also an opportunity for farmers to foster and grow relationships with their elected officials, and discuss the practical realities of how legislation and regulations impact farm families.

Among the areas discussed by farmers were concerns that funding to the University of Pennsylvania's School of Veterinary Medicine has been cut in the state's proposed budget. Farmers told lawmakers that PennVET plays a crucial role in training the next generation of large animal veterinarians, and the school also provides expertise for disease surveillance.

"PennVET plays an important role in maintaining the health and well-being of animal agriculture in the state, and identifying and controlling exposure of the industry to serious health threats like avian influenza," said Rick Ebert, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau President.

Farmers also encouraged lawmakers to address comprehensive pension reform due to the impact it is having on local school districts, which are spending an increasing amount of their budgets on pension costs. In addition, farmers discussed the burden that property taxes are having on their bottom line. During visits, farmers encouraged lawmakers to support legislation that would establish a minimum royalty of 12.5 percent for landowners, regardless of the costs incurred by natural gas companies to get gas to market.

Ag Literacy Week Makes Farm-To-Plate Connections

At schools across Pennsylvania, there's been quite a few conversations about carrots, apples, milkshakes and pasta. As part of the inaugural Ag Literacy Week, volunteers have been reading to school children and helping them make the farm-to-plate connections about their favorite foods. Spearheaded by the Pennsylvania Friends of Agriculture Foundation, Ag Literacy Week brought volunteer readers to more than 400 classrooms in public and private schools across the state. For a first-year program, Ag Literacy Week more than fulfilled its mission, said Tonya Wible, a program director with the foundation who helped spearhead the event.

"We are having readers in 400 classrooms reach 7,000 students," Wible said. "It would take us as foundation staff so much longer to reach those students. We are activating all of agriculture to achieve our mission."

Farmers and other volunteers read the book "Before We Eat: From Farm to Table," which tells the story of how food gets from the farm to the grocery store, and the men and women who are involved in the growing, transporting and selling of food. During the visits, volunteers led kids through activities about naming their favorite foods from a variety of food groups, like grains, vegetables, dairy and meats. The exercise helped kids make connections with the foods they eat at school and home. At the same time, it gave farmers the opportunity to tell students about their farms, and the work they put into growing food.

"We saw that there was a need for a lot more students to be reached so we wanted to put an activity together that's very simple that volunteers could feel comfortable doing and sharing their own story," she said. "It's important that students understand that farmers are just regular people in their communities who are working hard to provide food for them."

Penn State Extension Plans Tree Fruit Meeting

The meetings are being held in orchards across the state. Growers have an opportunity to visit other commercial tree fruit operations, learn from Extension specialists who are experts in their program areas, and discuss current tree fruit issues with other growers at a critical time of the growing season. The meetings will feature information on disease and pest monitoring and apple thinning. There is no registration fee for these programs. The dates, times, locations and contact person for preregistration are:

Tuesday, May 2, 6:30 – 8:30 pm – Lancaster/York Counties
Masonic Homes Orchard, 310 Eden View Rd, Elizabethtown
Contact person: Tim Elkner, tee2@psu.edu

Wednesday, May 3, 6:00 – 8:00 pm – Franklin County
Long Lane Orchard, 5355 Hess-Benedict Rd, Waynesboro,
Contact person: Tara Baugher, tab36@psu.edu

Thursday, May 4, 6:00 – 8:00 pm – Adams County
Hollabaugh Orchards, 545 Carlisle Road, Biglerville
Contact person: Tara Baugher, tab36@psu.edu

Wednesday, May 10, 6:30 – 8:30 pm – Western PA
Dawson's Orchards, 122 Petersburg Road, Enon Valley
Contact person: Bob Pollock, rcp3@psu.edu

Thursday, May 11, 9:00 am - noon – Erie County
Burch Farms Country Market, 9210 Sidehill Rd, North East
Contact person: Andy Muza, ajm4@psu.edu

Wednesday, May 17, 5:30pm - 8:00pm – Southeast PA
Stoudt's Fruit Farm, 47 Kauffman Ln, Hamburg,
Contact person: Kathy Salisbury, kvs14@psu.edu

Thursday, May 18, 6:30pm–8:30pm - Appalachian Growers
Boyer's Orchard, 4116 Cortland Dr, New Paris
Contact person: Tom Ford, tgf2@psu.edu

Tuesday, May 23, 6:00–8:00 pm – Central Susquehanna
Graybill's Fruit Farm, 246 Orchard Ln, Richfield
Contact person: John Esslinger, cje2@psu.edu

Wednesday, June 7, 6:00 – 8:00 pm – Multi-State
Barr Orchards, 21946 Durberry Rd, Smithsburg, MD 21783
Contact person: Tara Baugher, tab36@psu.edu
Source: Penn State