

AG ISSUES UPDATE
Edited by Brad Hollabaugh
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Farewell to Secretary Russell C. Redding

Secretary of Agriculture, Russell C. Redding, only served in that capacity for a little over one year, but his 16 years of service in the Department of Agriculture are historic. During his tenure, the attention to the specialty crops segment of agriculture in PA was unparalleled. His leadership with the Fruit Industry Task Force revealed a deep commitment to maintaining that important link between industry representatives and the Department of Agriculture.

Secretary Redding was recently named the Dean of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences at Delaware Valley College. This move will provide an excellent opportunity for him to continue to make a significant impact on Agricultural education for the future. Good Luck!

Governor Corbett Names New Ag Secretary

George Greig, state board director with the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, is Gov. Tom Corbett's pick to head the state Department of Agriculture. Greig, 59, of Crawford County will lead the agency that is charged with protecting and promoting agriculture and related industries and providing inspection services. The appointment must be approved by a majority vote in the state Senate.

Greig has worked with the farm bureau for six years and is a township supervisor in Conneaut Twp. He owns and operates a 650-acre dairy farm with his brother in Crawford County. Greig has held other farm-related positions and has served on the USDA Farm Service Agency Pennsylvania State Committee, the Crawford County Conservation District, and the Great Lakes Regional Water Board. Welcome acting Secretary Greig!

Exemptions for Farm Truck Drivers Now in Effect

Drivers of Pennsylvania farm trucks and farm truck combinations with an actual weight or weight rating of 26,000 pounds or less operated exclusively within the state are once again exempt from the Commonwealth's intrastate commercial trucking regulations. PennDOT Secretary Allen Biehler confirmed in a letter to PA Farm Bureau that because of Pennsylvania's recent enactment of Act 81, which took effect Dec. 18, these vehicles and drivers are no longer subject to Pennsylvania's intrastate motor carrier safety regulations. Visit www.pfb.com for details.

Revisions to the regulations last April had removed exemptions previously provided to farm trucks and drivers for nearly twenty years without compromising public safety. The changes had "imposed excessive, costly and time-consuming age restrictions and medical certification, hours of service, vehicle inspection and record keeping requirements," said PFB President Carl T. Shaffer. PFB will continue to seek the restoration of previous exemptions at the federal level that focus on farm trucks and trucks with combinations in excess of 26,000 pounds.

Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA)

President Obama signed the Food Safety Modernization Act on Jan. 3, 2011. This law represents one of the most significant reforms to the food safety provisions of the federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act since it was enacted in 1938.

The measure is designed to change the mission of FDA to preventing food-borne illnesses rather than reacting after an outbreak occurs. Early activity will focus on pilot programs to evaluate ways to improve traceability. However, the outcome will be a mandatory traceability system to "trade and trace" food.

FDA will also be tasked with the role of establishing mandatory standards for the safe production and harvesting of "high risk" fresh produce. 17,000 new inspectors may be hired to enforce the rules if the budget allows the investment.

Farms are exempt if they had less than \$500,000 in sales during the previous three-year period and the majority of the sales were sold directly to consumers or to restaurant/retail food establishments in the same state -- or not more than 275 miles from the farm. However, food sold to wholesalers is not exempt from the mandatory standards.

AFBF/PFB File Lawsuit against EPA over TMDL

Pennsylvania Farm Bureau has joined with the American Farm Bureau Federation to file a lawsuit in federal court against the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) challenging its process and overreach of authority in measures to be undertaken by farmers and others to improve the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

The lawsuit does not question the need to improve water quality in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, rather it asserts that the EPA exceeded its authority under the Clean Water Act to establish a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) or what EPA calls a "pollution diet" for the 64,000 square mile watershed. The lawsuit also contends that the science used by EPA to create the model used to develop the TMDL is flawed, because conclusions were based on wrong assumptions and inadequate information.

The lawsuit also points out that the agency's rush to dictate its diet by an arbitrary, self-imposed deadline failed to grant the public an adequate opportunity to check EPA's math in violation of the Administrative Procedures Act. For more information, visit PFB's website at www.pfb.com.

New Faces Leading PA House

Recent elections brought a new majority to the PA House of Representatives and the new majority and minority caucuses have elected new top leadership. Representative Sam Smith (Indiana Co.) has been elected Speaker of the House. The new Majority Leader is Mike Turzai (Allegheny Co.) and Stan Saylor (York Co.) is the new Majority Whip. Representative Bill Adolph (Delaware Co.) continues to be the Majority Chairman of the Appropriations Committee.

On the other side of the aisle, the new Minority Leader is Representative Frank Dermody (Allegheny Co.) and Minority Whip is Representative Mike Hanna (Clinton Co.). The new

Minority Chairman of Appropriations is Representative Joe Markosek (Allegheny Co.). Senate leadership remains largely unchanged for the coming session.

New Faces Leading Agriculture Committees

Chairs have been named for the House and Senate Agriculture Committees and many new faces are heading the committees. The new Majority Chairman of the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee is John Maher, who began as the Minority Chairman of the committee last session.

The new Minority Chairman is Representative Joseph Petrarca (D-Westmoreland Co.). In the Senate, Senator Elder Vogel (R-Beaver Co.) has been named as the Majority Chairman, while Lisa Boscola (D-Lehigh) is serving as the Minority Chair replacing Senator Mike O'Pake who recently passed away.

Agriculture Committees Named

The House and Senate leadership has appointed committees and released them to the public. Senate Agriculture Committee members include for the Republicans: Chairman Elder Vogel (Beaver), Mike Waugh (York), Mike Brubaker (Lancaster), John Eichelberger (Blair), Robert Robbins (Crawford) and Gene Yaw (Bradford). Senate Democrats include: Minority Chair, Lisa Boscola (Lehigh), Shirley Kitchen (Philadelphia), Tim Solobay (Washington) and Andrew Dinniman (Chester).

House Agriculture Committee members include for the Republicans: Chairman, John Maher (Allegheny), Steve Bloom (Cumberland), Karen Boback (Columbia), Michele Brooks (Crawford), Gordon Denlinger (Lancaster), Garth Everett (Lycoming), David Hickernell (Lancaster), Rob Kauffman (Franklin), Mark Keller (Perry), John Lawrence (Chester), David Millard (Columbia), Dan Moul (Adams), Tina Pickett (Bradford) Mike Reese (Westmoreland), and Mike Tobash (Schuylkill).

House Democrats Include the following: Minority Chairman Joseph Petrarca (Westmoreland), Brendan Boyle (Montgomery), Scott Conklin (Centre), Gary Haluska (Cambria), Sid Kavulich (Lackawanna), Bill Kortz (Allegheny), Deberah Kula (Fayette), Rick Mirabito (Lycoming), Brandon Neuman (Washington), and Matt Smith (Allegheny).

ERS Forecasts 2 to 3 Percent Increase in Food Prices

The Consumer Price Index for all food is projected to increase 2 to 3 percent in 2011, according to a forecast released Tuesday by the Agriculture Department's Economic Research Service.

Both food-at-home (grocery store) and food-away-from-home (restaurant) prices are also forecast to increase 2 to 3 percent. Although food price inflation was relatively weak for most of 2009 and 2010, higher food commodity and energy prices have recently exerted pressure on wholesale and retail food prices. Hence, higher prices are projected to push inflation toward the historical average inflation rate of 2 to 3 percent in 2011.

Census Points to Less Rural Representation in Congress

According to the latest U.S. Census numbers, urban areas continue to grow nationwide and will gain congressional seats, while rural areas will have less representation in Congress. The change could make it more difficult to build support for federal farm programs, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said during an appearance on Iowa Public Television's "*Iowa Press*" program.

"Because we have agricultural production that is the best in the world, consumers have a tremendous advantage in America," Vilsack said. "We only spend about 10 percent to 15 percent of our paycheck for groceries. Part of the reason we do that is because we have a strong safety net for those producers who are faced with bad weather or bad markets. That allows them to stay in business."