

AG ISSUES UPDATE
Edited by Brad Hollabaugh
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Agriculture Programs Suffer Major Cuts in Pennsylvania State Budget

Several key agricultural programs, including Penn State's Cooperative Extension and Agriculture Research programs, suffered deep cuts in the new state budget approved by the General Assembly and recently signed by Governor Tom Corbett. The final state budget included cuts totaling nearly \$10.5 million to Penn State's Agriculture Extension and Agriculture Research programs. Early estimates indicate that the cuts may result in the elimination of nearly 200 of the 814 permanent jobs within Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

Also eliminated in the new state budget was the state crop insurance incentive program. The program, which began as a \$3 million appropriation five years ago, has now been chipped away to nothing. However, the General Assembly did double REAP (Resource Enhancement and Protection Act of Pennsylvania) program funding to \$10 million and restored funding to the state budget for the Department of Agriculture in the area of Agriculture Research.

State Senate Ag Committee Takes Action on PA Preferred Legislation

The state Senate Agriculture Committee has reported out House Bill 1424, the Pennsylvania Preferred Act, introduced by Rep. Stephen Bloom (R - 199th Dist.). The House-approved legislation would require the state Agriculture Department to acquire, register, license, protect and promote the PA Preferred® trademark for use in the sale and promotion of Pennsylvania-produced products. The PA Preferred® program was started by the Agriculture Department in 2004 to expand consumer markets for high-quality PA products.

EPA Approves Two Insecticides for Control of Invasive Stink Bug

On June 24, 2011, EPA approved, for emergency use, the insecticide dinotefuran (trade names Venom and Scorpion) on tree fruit to help manage populations of the brown marmorated stink bug. The Section 18 emergency exemption, applies to Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, North Carolina and New Jersey.

Under the exemption, producers of stone fruit and pome fruit are allowed to manage the brown marmorated stink bug with two applications of dinotefuran by ground equipment per season. The approval expires on October 15, 2011.

Under the emergency exemption provision of the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act, states can petition EPA for the use of an unregistered pesticide on a temporary basis if it will help alleviate an emergency pest problem. Before approval, EPA must be able to support the use from a health and safety standpoint. EPA has assessed the risks of the exemption involving dinotefuran and has made a safety finding for the use. Dinotefuran is already approved for use on leafy vegetables.

Also, EPA has approved an additional use for an insecticide that may help manage stink bugs in organic production systems. The new product contains azadirachtin and pyrethrins, which are derived from botanical ingredients. This product is now approved for use on many crops where

stink bug management is needed, and it can be used by organic farmers.

EPA continues to work with Congress, USDA, lead state agencies, various federal research agencies, universities, private companies and growers, in an effort to develop a sustainable pest-management tool box to manage brown marmorated stink bugs. For more information: <http://www.epa.gov/pesticides>

U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee Reports Out NPDES Permitting Bill

The U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee has reported out H.R. 872, the Reducing Regulatory Burdens Act of 2011. The measure clarifies that National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits are not required when applying pesticides, according to Environmental Protection Agency-approved labels. For most of the past four decades, water quality concerns from pesticide applications were addressed within the registration process under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act, rather than a Clean Water Act permitting program. H.R. 872 restores the previous regulatory framework.

Under a federal court ruling in 2009, pesticide applicators would have to apply for an NPDES permit if the chemical reaches a body of water, which could include ditches and culverts. While NPDES permits will not provide any additional environmental benefits, the complex new requirements expose farmers to potential citizen action suits for something as simple as paperwork violations.

Roberts Introduces Bill on Transportation Regulations

Sen. Pat Roberts (R-Kan.) introduced a bill recently that would exempt those who transport agricultural products from a costly regulation that “stifles their ability to quickly and effectively carry out business,” according to a news release from his office. Sens. Jerry Moran (R-Kan.), Mike Johanns (R-Neb.) and Ben Nelson (D-Neb.) are original co-sponsors of the bill.

The bill would exempt all class A commercial driver’s license holders who are custom harvesters, agriculture retailers, agriculture business employees, agriculture cooperative employees or agriculture producers from the requirement to obtain a hazardous material endorsement under part 383 of title 49 of the Code of Federal Regulations, while operating a service vehicle carrying diesel fuel in quantities of 1,000 gallons or less if the tank containing diesel fuel is clearly marked with a placard reading, “Diesel Fuel.”

Threat to United States from New European E. coli Strain Unclear

Over the centuries, many unexpected things have come to the United States from Germany and caught on -- lager beer, sauerkraut, bratwurst and the Volkswagen Beetle are a few that come to mind -- but don't necessarily expect the novel strain of E. coli that is responsible for more than 2,800 cases of illness and 27 deaths in Germany to show up immediately in this country, advises a food borne disease expert in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

Because the United States imports just 2 percent of its food from Europe, and because outbreak-related export bans of fresh foods are in place, it is unlikely that the current outbreak strain of

bacteria will arrive here from Germany said Edward Dudley, an assistant professor of food science at Penn State who studies the biology and evolution of pathogens that contaminate food.

Almost nothing is known about where this novel strain of E. coli exists in agricultural settings in Europe or in the United States, Dudley noted. He emphasized the importance of finding out where the German outbreak originated, and with what kind of food.

Forecasts for Nation's Fruit Crops Say Volumes Could Be Larger-Than-Normal

Fruit harvests across the country will be later than usual this year thanks to cold, wet weather. Despite the delays, however, some forecasters are predicting larger-than-normal volumes for some crops in 2011.

Those were two of the main themes of the 56th annual Fruit Crop Guesstimate, held June 22 in Grand Rapids, Mich. The Guesstimate, organized by the Michigan Frozen Food Packers Association, annually predicts the size of the coming fruit crop – in Michigan and across the country.

Apples

Denise Donohue, executive director of the Michigan Apple Committee, gave the 2011 guesstimate for the U.S. apple crop: 229 million bushels. That number also happens to be the five-year average, she said.

Washington state, the largest producer, will contribute an estimated 122 million bushels to the national total, Donohue said. That's down from last year's estimate of 140 million bushels and from the five-year average of 131 million bushels.

New York, the No. 2 producer, might contribute 29 million bushels this year, down just a little from its five-year average. It's been cloudy and rainy in the Empire State, just like in Michigan, she said.

Michigan, the No. 3 producer, might produce 26 million bushels of apples this year, Donohue said, much higher than last year's estimate of 15 million bushels and the five-year average of 19.8 million bushels.

Donohue listed the 2011 guesstimates from the other major production states. **In Pennsylvania, where it rained all but three days during the pollination period, the guesstimate is 11.3 million bushels, down slightly from the five-year average of 11.4 million.** California, about two weeks behind normal due to cool weather, is expecting 6 million bushels, down from the five-year average of 8 million. Virginia is expecting 5.3 million bushels.

Sweet cherries

Mark Doherty of Peterson Farms gave the 2011 guesstimate for Michigan sweet cherries: 41 million pounds (3 million fresh, 1 million canned, 12 million frozen and 25 million brined). That's up quite a bit from last year's 31.2 million pounds.

Tart cherries

The 2011 guesstimate for tart cherry production in Michigan, the largest producer, is 215 million pounds.

Tom Facer of Farm Fresh First and Phil Korson of Cherry Marketing Institute gave the 2011 guesstimates for other major states: 23 million pounds in Utah (up from 22.8 million in 2010); 13.5 million pounds in Washington (down from 15.4 million last year); 8.8 million pounds in Wisconsin (up from 5.5 million); 6 million pounds in New York (down from 7.5 million); **2 million pounds in Pennsylvania (down from 2.2 million)**; 1.8 million pounds in Oregon (up from 1.2 million).

Peaches

Leo Steffens of Peterson Farms gave the 2011 guesstimate for U.S. processed peaches: 556,000 tons. If that holds, it will be down from 2010's total of 564,000 tons and the three-year average of 576,000 tons.

Michigan's processed peach numbers were not given (to avoid disclosure of individual operations), but Steffens said he expected a full crop this year – which would be twice as large as last year's crop. The crops look nice in other states, too, including New York, Pennsylvania, Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina, Steffens said.