

AG ISSUES UPDATE
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House Panel Passes E-Verify, Rejects Ag Worker Amendment

The House Judiciary Committee recently approved legislation mandating the use of E-Verify for all employers in the United States. During committee deliberations, Rep. Dan Lungren (R-Calif.) attempted to offer an amendment establishing a new agricultural worker program; the amendment was ruled out of order.

As a result, the final E-Verify bill approved by the committee contains no agricultural worker program. In addition, the committee deleted a provision in the bill that provided an exemption from E-Verify for agricultural employees doing seasonal work and returning to their original employer.

Under the proposed Legal Workforce Act, introduced by House Judiciary Committee Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas), employers must confirm all employees' eligibility through the federal E-Verify system. The provisions relating to agriculture would take effect no later than three years after enactment of the bill; in some instances, they could apply sooner.

US Apple, AFBF, and other Agricultural groups agree that should mandatory E-Verify be imposed, there must be a concurrent solution in place to satisfy the need for legal workers. Currently, the H2-A program has not become an effective, efficient program to identify candidates for agricultural jobs that U.S. citizens are unwilling to fill.

USFRA Surveys Reveal Disconnect Between Americans, Food

Findings of two national surveys about food and how it is grown and raised have recently been released during "The Food Dialogues," a town hall-style discussion presented by the U.S. Farmers & Ranchers Alliance. The surveys focused separately on the opinions, attitudes and questions consumers and farmers/ranchers have about the current and future state of how food is grown and raised in the U.S. Results reveal that lack of access to information, as well as no interest or passion for the topic, have divided consumer opinion on the direction of agriculture.

"Americans have a lot of questions about where their food comes from, how it is raised and if it is good for their health long-term," said Bob Stallman, chairman of USFRA and president of the American Farm Bureau Federation.

"USFRA commissioned two separate surveys to first ask farmers and ranchers what they wished Americans could have more information about where their food comes from. We then asked consumers what questions they have on the same topic. The findings of both surveys indicate there is an opportunity for more dialogue between farmers, ranchers and the American public about how food is grown and raised in the U.S."

For more details about the survey, visit: <http://www.marketwatch.com/story/nationwide-surveys-reveal-disconnect-between-americans-and-their-food-2011-09-22>.

Health Officials Warn of More Illnesses from Cantaloupes

Health officials warn that there may be more illness and death from the outbreak of listeria traced to contaminated cantaloupes. So far, the outbreak has sickened 72 people and claimed 16 lives in 18 states - making it the country's deadliest outbreak of food-borne illness in more than 10 years.

Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Margaret Hamburg said illnesses are expected for weeks to come because the incubation period for listeriosis can be a month or even longer. "We will see more cases likely through October," Hamburg said. The contaminated cantaloupes are linked to Jensen Farms in Holly, Colo. Jensen Farms last shipped cantaloupes on Sept. 10.

Robust Growth Reported for U.S. Farmers' Markets in 2011

More than 1,000 new farmers' markets were added across the country this year as interest in local food continues to grow. It's a trend that pleases Deputy Agriculture Secretary Kathleen Merrigan, according to the [October issue of Foodie News](#).

According to the Agriculture Department's 2011 National Farmers Market Directory, a total of 7,175 farmers' markets now operate throughout the nation as growing numbers of farmers market their products directly to consumers. Last year, USDA reported 6,132 farmers' markets in operation. Recent media reports have suggested that a glut of farmers' markets exists in some regions of the country. Merrigan doesn't buy it.

"I don't think that there is a serious problem," Merrigan told Foodie News editor Cyndie Sirekis in an exclusive interview. "The marketplace will straighten this out. People will move and move their product...move their markets where the customers are. There will be temporary adjustments in supply and demand until things even out."

Pennsylvania Preferred Legislation Headed to Governor's Desk

Legislation that provides for the licensing and use of the PA Preferred trademark is bound for the desk of Gov. Tom Corbett. A House bill sponsored by Rep. Stephen Bloom, R-Cumberland, was recently approved by both the House and Senate.

The Pennsylvania Preferred Act requires the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture to acquire, register license and promote the PA Preferred trademark, Bloom said. PDA will be given the tools necessary to effectively administer the PA Preferred program, he said. The PA Preferred Program began in 2004.

Application Extended to Submit for Liquid Fuel Tax Rebates

State Treasurer Rob McCord recently announced that farmers and volunteer fire, ambulance, and rescue squads facing a September 30 deadline to apply for liquid fuel tax refunds now have until October 31 to submit their applications to the Pennsylvania Board of Finance and Revenue.

Treasurer McCord, who serves as the board's chairman, said the extension should help farmers and volunteer fire and EMS squads that are trying to recover and regroup from damaging floods earlier this month. He noted the extension applies to farmers in 27 counties declared federal disaster areas: Adams, Bradford, Bucks, Chester, Columbia, Cumberland, Dauphin, Delaware, Lancaster, Lebanon, Lehigh, Luzerne, Lycoming, Monroe, Montgomery, Montour, Northampton, Northumberland, Perry, Philadelphia, Schuylkill, Snyder, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Union, Wyoming and York.

Any agricultural producer who uses liquid fuels – such as gasoline or undyed diesel – as part of their production operation is eligible to apply for a refund. Producers may claim fuel used to operate regular licensed vehicles as part of production within a 25 mile radius of the farm. Trucks, pickups, vans, and four-wheel drive vehicles, as well as machinery that requires fuel to operate, are eligible.

The board's application deadline extension is in line with other extensions the Internal Revenue Service and the Pennsylvania Department of Revenue instituted for state and federal taxes. For more

information, visit www.patreasury.org and click on the "Board of Finance and Revenue" link at the top right, or call the board's liquid fuels section at 717-787-6534.

Rainy Weather Holding Stink Bugs at Bay – For Now

Last year's least-popular infestation – the brown marmorated stink bug -- is back this fall, but not necessarily with a vengeance. Think of it as a rain delay, local exterminators say. Rather than sneaking into your house, stink bugs are lounging in local fields, awaiting a dry commute to your place, so they can spackle your screens, torture your pets and perch on your coffee cups.

Last year was particularly bad during September through November. The long stretch of warm weather led to a "double hatch" -- two separate periods of stink bug moms producing little stink bug miracles -- which created a population boom. "You don't expect that every year," Riley said. But it could still happen this fall.

Stink bugs damaged \$200 million to \$250 million worth of the mid-Atlantic agricultural crop last year. That includes almost 20 percent of the region's apple crops; half of Pennsylvania's peaches; up to 20 percent of the tomatoes in areas of Maryland, Delaware and New Jersey; and, in some regions, entire sweet corn crops, according to industry and agricultural experts.

Wet Spring Takes A Toll On Many Pennsylvania Apple Crops

It's been a tough year for apple growers. A wet spring encouraged disease, and bees that fertilize the blossoms stayed warm and dry in their hives. "It's not the best quality I've ever had," said Brian Lehman, of Lehman Fruit Farm in Girard Township. He said the flavor of the apples is good, but a disease called "apple scab" left black spots on much of the fruit.

"People won't eat" the affected apples, said Andy Muza, extension educator at Penn State Extension Erie County. "They can, but they like them nice and smooth." Despite the problems, Muza said he doesn't expect the price of good apples will change much. "I don't think the consumer will see it. It's the grower that takes the hit."

It's hard to say what grocers will do about prices, though. "We can't speculate on (price) as of yet," said Theresa Jackson, consumer-affairs manager for Wegmans on Thursday. Price hikes or no, Jackson said she expects that apples might be hard to get this season. "Essentially, there have been a few gaps in the supply up until now, and looking into fall, we may indeed see a decreased supply of locally grown apples in both number and variety."

Pumpkin Patches Endure Wet Season

The unusually hot start to the summer, coupled with a violent end to the season low-lighted by rains, hurricanes and tropical storms, has shrunken pumpkin yields in some places while increasing their costs a bit. Scott Guiser, an educator specializing in agriculture for Penn State's cooperative extension, said this week that damage to crops really depended on where farms are located.

"This summer obviously did not produce ideal conditions for farming, but we see a lot of diversification farms here, so it maybe wasn't as bad as you would think. Of course, we have had farms that have suffered substantial damage, but it really depended on where you were." Guiser said while some late-season crops took a hit locally, pumpkins fared OK compared to other parts of Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York where Halloween might be celebrated with fewer jack-o'-lanterns this year.

Nathan Kohler, co-owner of his family farm Horsham, said the pumpkin yield was a bit smaller because the nonstop rains late in the summer didn't give the fields a chance to dry out.

“Some of them never really pollinated during the wet times and some of them rotted, but most of them were far enough along that it wasn’t a big problem,” Kohler said.

People may also notice a slight rise in pumpkin retail prices as Kohler said they were forced to hike the price a nickel to 60 cents per pound. In general, when yields are at their best, Kohler said, wholesale prices for pumpkins and other gourds runs about 15 cents per pound. This year, he said he has seen the average about 25 cents per pound.

That is far better than what farmers are charging and paying in places around places like New York state. There, pumpkin farmers had been having a difficult year even before Hurricane Irene. Heavy rains this spring meant many farms had to postpone planting for two or three weeks, setting back the fall harvest.

A late harvest can be fatal to business because pumpkin sales plummet after Halloween on Oct. 31. Wholesalers need to get pumpkins on their way to stores by mid-September. Some farmers in those areas reached out to pumpkin farmers in places like Pennsylvania to cover orders.

Pennsylvania Lawmakers Introduce Flood Relief Package

Five Pennsylvania senators have introduced legislation in the wake of flooding to help those impacted by the disaster. The seven-piece package provides financial assistance, infrastructure funding and tax breaks for affected areas.

If adopted, the bills would establish an account for state grant money for individuals and families; bring in \$250 million for infrastructure repair; allow taxing bodies to abate real estate taxes for flood impacted properties, and other measures. The senators called the legislation a lifeline for people who have been seriously impacted by the flood.

Disaster Response – Hurricane Irene & Tropical Storm Lee

Many county, state and federal agencies are coordinating together and working as quickly as possible to provide information and other assistance to agriculture enterprises that have suffered severe damage and losses from Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee. Pennsylvania Farm Bureau has been interacting with the agencies and other groups to inform them of questions and problems which need attention.

A Farm Disaster Help Center has been launched at PFB Headquarters that will gather and distribute information related to disaster assistance and impacts on farm operations as soon as answers are available. Such information will be presented in a manner that is easy-to-understand and act upon as possible.

These resources can be viewed on their website homepage at www.pfb.com or at a special website - - farmdisasterhelp.pfb.com. PFB will be continually posting information as it becomes available as well as publishing it in future editions of *Farm Bureau Express* and *Country Focus*.

Reminder: These updates and all the latest information will also be posted on the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau Facebook site. You can find the site by clicking on the following link: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Pennsylvania-Farm-Bureau/133294606683256>. “Like” Farm Bureau at the top of our page to get the latest updates and much more.

Farm Bureau members can also send a request to GovCom@pfb.com to be added to a distribution list to receive occasional updates by e-mail.

Meanwhile, state and federal agencies have asked PFB to inform them of questions and problems as they arise. Such input can be provided to Pennsylvania Farm Bureau by e-mail to GovCom@pfb.com, by fax to (717) 731-3575 or by calling Ginny Keever at (717) 761-2740.

FFA Reaches Out to Connect With Past Members

Although Nick Frey doesn't wear his blue-and-gold corduroy jacket these days, he's still close to FFA. The Purdue University graduate, who helps run his family's 6,300-acre farming operation in Indiana, remains close to his high school agriculture teacher and FFA advisor. Frey and his family help the North Montgomery High School FFA Chapter conduct its Farm Safety Day each year.

Frey is one of more than 7 million people who have belonged to FFA since the organization's inception 83 years ago. Because of how FFA prepared him for leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education, he stayed connected to FFA and remains an ardent supporter.

A national campaign launched in September called CONNECT! will communicate the importance of FFA to current and former members and supporters of the organization, increase awareness for FFA and share the organization's impact on students and the agricultural industry.

The campaign invites people who have been involved with FFA, or anyone who is interested in the organization, to visit www.FFA.org/Connect, get in touch and establish a new or renewed relationship with FFA. Those looking to connect with FFA can also do so by calling 888-433-2674.