

AG ISSUES UPDATE
Edited by Brad Hollabaugh
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Farm Bill Put on Hold through November Election

Unable to reach any compromise in the weeks leading up to the November election, Congress did not vote on a new Farm Bill, and has left for recess, putting off the task of adopting a new bill until after the November election.

Depending on the outcome of the November elections, a Farm Bill could be completed during the lame duck session, or not until early next year. Earlier this year, the U.S. Senate passed a version of the Farm Bill, and the House Agriculture Committee adopted its own version. Both versions called for the elimination of direct payments, strengthening crop insurance, and continuing conservation program that farmers have relied on to lessen their environmental impact.

Without action by Congress, 37 titles in the Farm Bill will expire.

Penn State Names Interim Dean of Agriculture

Penn State has named Dr. Barbara Christ, as the Interim Dean of College of Agricultural Sciences, starting Nov 1. Dean Bruce McPheron is leaving Penn State to serve in a similar capacity at Ohio State.

Christ, who is a senior associate dean and professor, has been with the college since 1984. She was appointed senior associate dean in 2009. She has performed research in plant pathology and worked with agriculture extension leaders.

Penn State will soon launch a national search for its next dean.

2013 Project Year Application Period for Direct Farm Sales Grant Program Has Begun

An application period for grants under the Direct Farm Sales Grant Program, administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, has begun. For the 2013 Project Year, the application period is September 17, 2012, to November 9, 2012.

The Program provides funds to Commonwealth-based businesses that manage or operate a farm stand or farmers' markets, nonprofit organizations, farmers and local governments for projects intended to promote new or existing farmers' markets. Projects must pertain to the increased consumption of specialty crops.

The maximum grant amount per farm stand or farmers' market location shall be \$7,500 and applicants shall be expected to provide 25% of the approved grant amount in matching funds or in-kind goods or services. The anticipated date for the award of grants and notice thereof is expected to be on or before February 1, 2013. The application, work plan and budget will reflect March 1, 2013, as the project start date and the project completion date will be September 30, 2013.

Hand-delivered applications must be received in the Bureau by 4 p.m. on Friday, November 9, 2012. Applications which are mailed must be postmarked no later than Friday, November 9, 2012, and received no later than November 19, 2012.

Completed applications should be addressed to or delivered to Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Food Distribution, Direct Farm Sales Grant Program, 2301 North Cameron Street, Room 401, Harrisburg, PA 17110-9408.

More information about the Program and application forms can be accessed at the Department's web site at www.agriculture.state.pa.us under "Bureau of Food Distribution" or by contacting Sandy Hopple, [\(800\) 468-2433](tel:8004682433).

Penn State University Earns Beginning Farmer Grant

Penn State recently received nearly \$500,000 to provide beginning farmers training and resources. The grant is part of an \$18 million federal program, spread throughout 24 states, to help support the next generation of farmers.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture makes grants available to colleges and institutions to provide education, technical assistance and outreach programs to individuals who have been farming for 10 years or less.

"In the past few decades, U.S. agriculture has become the second most productive sector of the American economy thanks to farmers adopting technology, reducing debt, and effectively managing risk," said USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack. "To protect and sustain these successes, we must continue to build an agriculture industry diverse and successful enough to attract the smartest, hardest-working people in the nation."

Future funding of the program is dependent on the adoption of the next Farm Bill.

REAP Tax Incentive Program Available

Pennsylvania farmers can now apply for nearly \$7 million in tax credits to purchase equipment, or begin best management practices that improve conservation.

The Resource Enhancement and Protection, or REAP program, is a tax incentive program for farmers who use private support to reduce erosion and sediment impacts on local waterways.

The program is administered by the State Conservation Commission, and helps agriculture producers purchase equipment, or make improvements to their property that aid in conservation of natural resources.

Farmers who have completed projects can now submit applications, and will be considered on a first-come, first-served basis. Private investors often provide the necessary capital to complete a project, and in return receive tax credits.

Since the program began in 2007, more than \$39.5 million worth of projects have been approved. Applications for REAP are available at www.pda.state.pa.us/REAP under "Forms" or by calling [717-787-8821](tel:717-787-8821).

Arguments Heard in Chesapeake Bay Case

Oral arguments were heard on October 4th in Federal District Court in Harrisburg in the lawsuit against the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) brought by the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF), Pennsylvania Farm Bureau (PFB) and other agriculture organizations. The agriculture plaintiffs are challenging EPA's authority to direct how states achieve water pollution reductions in the Chesapeake Bay through use of a "Total Maximum Load" (TMDL).

Attorneys for AFBF and other agriculture groups argued the federal Clean Water Act gives states, not the federal government, the power to decide how pollution reduction in the Bay will be done among the state's landowners businesses and communities. Attorneys for the agriculture plaintiffs also argued that the Chesapeake Bay Model used by EPA to support its TMDL is illegally flawed, and that EPA failed to provide sufficient information on the Model during the public comment period that the law requires to be given allow those affected by the TMDL to adequately comment on it.

More than 20 Pennsylvania farmers, as well as staff from several state Farm Bureau organizations within the watershed, attended the court session to show their support for the legal challenge. The lawsuit was initially filed against EPA in January 2011, shortly after the agency issued its TMDL for the Bay.

DMAP Permits Valid for Archery Season

Landowners who are using the Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP) can enlist the help of hunters for your deer management programs throughout established deer seasons. Those seasons include early archery season in September through the last deer hunting season in January.

For every five acres of cultivated land, qualified landowners receive one DMAP coupon. The coupons can be distributed to hunters who redeem the coupon for a property-specific DMAP doe tag. To learn more visit the Pennsylvania Game Commission website at:

www.pgc.state.pa.us.

Kids Can Explore Farmers' Markets Online

The popular agricultural education gaming site MyAmericanFarm.org now includes an updated version of the Farmers' Market Challenge, a game that helps students in kindergarten through fifth grade practice essential math skills while learning about food and healthy choices.

After correctly answering math questions, such as how much change do you get back if you buy \$2.50 worth of squash and pay the farmer \$3, the player gets to read agricultural facts, such as vegetables that are high in potassium—sweet potatoes, white beans and tomatoes—are nutritious.

As with all of the games available at MyAmericanFarm.org, the Farmers' Market Challenge is aligned to educational standards. The game also now includes an "Easy Reader" e-Comic book that takes young readers on a virtual trip to a farmers' market with their friends.

Both the game and e-Comic can be found at http://www.myamericanfarm.org/games/farmers_market_challenge/.

Agritourism Website Focuses on Safety

With the growing popularity of taking the family to visit corn mazes, pumpkin patches and other agricultural attractions, it's increasingly important for Agritourism farmers to keep visitors safe. A new, interactive Web guide to help farmers improve safety is available at www.safeagritourism.com.

Offered by the Marshfield Clinic, a large, multi-location medical practice in Wisconsin, the safe Agritourism guide includes walk-throughs that use photos to contrast improper practices with best practices and guidelines, checklists that farm operators can use to do their own walk-throughs and resources such as signs, policies, logos and other printable items.

The Agritourism safety Web guide was announced in conjunction with National Farm Safety and Health Week, which was Sept. 16-22. This year's theme was "Agricultural Safety and Health...A Family Affair."

Fact Sheet Available on Labeling Organic Products

USDA has made a two-page fact sheet on labeling organic products available on the web. The fact sheet covers the rules for both certified and uncertified operations. You can access the fact sheet at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELDEV3004446&acct=nopgeninfo>.

Pennsylvania Farm Bureau Mobile Ag Lab Celebrates Its 10th Year

The highly successful Mobile Agriculture Education Science Lab program is celebrating 10 years of bringing agriculture education to more than 500,000 students. The Pennsylvania Friends of Agriculture Foundation, a charitable organization supported by PFB, kicked off its 10th anniversary celebration with a recent event at an elementary school in Sunbury.

The school has hosted the ag lab since its inception. During the event, teachers at the school praised the ag lab for its educational mission, and the way that lessons are designed to get children engaged in science. "The labs really help kids develop a love of science," said Elizabeth Vasquez, a fourth grade teacher at the school. "A lot of our students do not have agriculture experience, so it is important to bring them into the labs."

PFB President Carl T. Shaffer, who chairs the foundation, said the popularity of the labs has allowed the foundation to expand from one lab, when the program began, to six. "The Mobile Ag Ed Science Lab program has exceeded our high expectations, providing fun, hands-on learning about food, farming and other agriculture-related products to hundreds of thousands of students across the state," he said.