

AG ISSUES UPDATE
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E-Verify. The Debate Continues in PA.....

Pennsylvania State Rep. Daryl Metcalfe (R., Butler), a leading critic of the Obama administration's efforts to change immigration laws, opened hearings recently on a package of 15 bills designed to crack down on what he called illegal "invaders."

Metcalfe's proposed laws would require Pennsylvania employers to use the voluntary federal database E-Verify to authenticate employees' Social Security numbers; raise penalties on companies that hire illegal workers; add state penalties for the federal crime of human smuggling; and require a different type of birth certificate for the U.S.-born children of illegal immigrants, among other restrictions.

Metcalfe, chairman of the state Government Committee, said he sponsored the package of bills, under the rubric "National Security Begins at Home," to "combat Pennsylvania's estimated 140,000 illegal alien invaders" who, according to his calculations, cost the state about \$1.5 billion a year in educational costs, medical services, and other benefits.

The Harrisburg hearing included testimony by groups supporting tougher restrictions, including the Tea Party Immigration Coalition and the Federation for American Immigration Reform. Their representatives said illegal immigration is not only costly, but it jeopardizes national security. Local police from Berks County and Beaver Meadow also testified in support.

Other speakers opposed the legislation, including farmer Kay Hollabaugh, who grows fruit and vegetables in Biglerville, near Gettysburg. The produce, she said, is entirely handpicked by immigrants whose legal status she verifies using the I-9 form required by the federal government. That form demands a government-issued photo ID and Social Security number.

She said the procedures envisioned by the legislation, such as the mandatory use of E-Verify, would create bureaucratic burdens that will threaten the survival of farms like hers. Moreover, she said, the error rate in the E-Verify database makes it unreliable - a statement which Metcalfe disputed. "If you are scared of immigrant laborers now," said Hollabaugh, whose farm is near Gettysburg, "just wait until we have to be at the mercy of other countries to obtain our food."

Even before the first witness testified, the bills drew fire from Philadelphia Bar Association chancellor Rudolph Garcia.

Hurricane Irene Causes Variable Damage to Fruit and other Farm Crops

Pennsylvania Farm Bureau (PFB) says early reports indicate that high winds and heavy rain from Hurricane Irene have caused sporadic damage to farms and orchards in several areas of Pennsylvania. The most common problem cited by farmers is that field corn was leaning or flattened by strong winds, while apples and other fruits fell to the ground during the storm.

Jim Schupp, the director of Penn State's Fruit Research and Extension Center, confirmed that winds from Hurricane Irene were especially troubling for growers of Gala and Honeycrisp apples, who had just begun harvesting the crop. Schupp says heavy rains also caused some apples to crack, while the wind uprooted trees.

Penn State Announces Cooperative Extension Restructuring Plan

Penn State has put forth a proposal to restructure its county cooperative extension offices in the wake of funding cuts from the latest state budget. The proposal would create 20 district offices, which would provide administrative support for its region, comprised of anywhere between two and five counties. The district would be managed by a district director, based in a county office. District boards would be created, with representation from each county.

Penn State would phase in the creation of districts, finishing that work by July 2012. Penn State officials said the restructuring would still give cooperative extension a presence in all 67 counties, and would increase efficiency and cost savings. Penn State has not announced how much staffing will be reduced in the restructuring effort.

Experts: Stink Bug Infestation Expected To Be Worse This Fall

Experts said stink bugs are making a comeback and people in western Pennsylvania should expect the population to be worse than it was last year. A major concern is that the bugs will ruin crops, which could result in higher prices at the grocery store.

Government scientists said the stink bug explosion that was reported in several areas over the past year is only expected to grow. Insect experts said as the weather gradually gets cooler, stink bugs are going to look for warm places to stay, which means the bugs may migrate south.

Scientists said stink bugs are showing up as far south as North Carolina. The Environmental Protection Agency has approved two new insecticides so farmers can control the bugs. However, there is a downside to the apparent solution: the chemicals also kill bugs farmers keep around to kill other crop-eating pests.

At Soergel's Orchard in Wexford, the owners there said they're using traps to keep the stink bug population down. Reed Soergel said while they're losing apples to the stink bug infestation, the apples the bugs haven't touched are safe. "It's going to take some time and we just hope the public is realizing that and not to be afraid of the stuff," Soergel said. Stink bugs don't make fruit inedible, just unsellable.

Federal DOT Says It Has No Plans for New Farm Vehicle Rules

Federal regulators have said they have no intention of proposing new regulations on the transportation of agriculture products. The U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration released guidance to make sure states understand the exemptions that allow farmers and their employees to accomplish their work. FMCSA sought public comment on three specific questions regarding farm vehicles after recent encounters where some states expressed intent to broaden regulatory reach.

Pennsylvania Farm Bureau offered comments to the administration, saying that holding farm operations to the same standards as commercial trucking operations makes little sense and is not justified. "We want to make it absolutely clear that farmers will not be subjected to new and impractical safety regulations," said U.S. Transportation Deputy Secretary John Porcari. "The farm community can be confident that states will continue to follow the regulatory exemptions for farmers that have always worked so well."

ERS: Net Farm Income Should Reach Record \$103.6 Billion

U.S. net farm income should reach a record \$103.6 billion this year, according to an updated report released recently by the Agriculture Department's Economic Research Service. This represents a 31 percent jump over last year, with ERS citing higher crop and livestock prices as reasons for the big gain. ERS pegged 2010 net farm income at \$79.1 billion. In its February estimate, ERS forecast net farm income for 2011 at \$97.3 billion.

The ERS report *Farm Income and Costs: 2011 Farm Sector Income Forecast* (<http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/FarmIncome/Data/Va0811us.htm>) notes that crop receipts are expected to rise by more than 19 percent in 2011 as large increases are expected across a number of crop categories.

Fruits and Tree Nuts are expected to rise to \$21.9 Billion, a \$0.4 billion increase over 2010, while Vegetables and Melons are expected to be \$21.6 billion, a \$1.7 billion increase over last year.

Maslyn Highlights Expectations of Deficit Super Committee

In an interview recently with Delta Farm Press, Mark Maslyn, executive director of public policy with the American Farm Bureau Federation, discussed expectations regarding the work of the 12-member congressional "super committee" that will find ways to reduce the budget deficit by \$1.2 trillion to \$1.5 trillion by 2021.

Maslyn said he expects the House and Senate Agriculture committees will develop a list of savings to agriculture spending that the two bodies will forward to the super committee. He said he expects the recommendations to be specific.

"The super committee isn't giving—or hasn't yet given, anyway—the Agriculture committees a target to reach," Maslyn told the publication. "There may be some informal discussions going on. But they haven't told the committees (a final number yet)".

"Absent that number, I think what will happen is the Agriculture committees will determine what they see is a reasonable offer. There's probably a lot of back-and-forth, right now, to try and determine what the parameters are going to be."

After a Down Year, Mushrooms Rebound in PA

Chester County grows nearly half the white mushrooms America eats, and growers in 2010 produced more than ever, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The 61 growers of Agaricus mushrooms in Chester County sent 402 million pounds to market in the 2010-11 growing season, which runs from July 1 to June 30. That's an increase of 15 percent compared with the year before. Pennsylvania growers led all states

during that period, thanks to Chester County, in production of U.S. Agaricus mushrooms, which include the common button mushroom and brown mushrooms such as the Portobello and Cremini.

Local and national experts, however, say the numbers do not tell the whole story. Kevin Pautler, USDA spokesman, said that during the previous growing year, Agaricus production was down in the county, state and nation. Therefore over a two-year period, production was up, but not as dramatically as 2010-11 appears. Still, it is an increase. Pautler believes production is up because of restaurant demand. "Mushrooms are a specialty item: steak and mushrooms," Pautler said.

Mushroom growing in Chester County started "years and years and years ago," Pautler said. "The mushroom industry in Kennett Square goes back decades. It has the raw materials: horse and poultry manure, the expertise and marketing all built in. (Mushroom growing) is well established in the area."

Jerry Yeatman, president of C.P. Yeatman & Sons in London Grove, said production is up for a number of reasons: demand, new production coming on and newer methods of curing compost in bulk that reduces the traditional 11-week growing cycle to nine weeks. Yeatman, a fourth-generation mushroom grower, agreed the increase in demand is coming from restaurants. "They are starting to have a recovery as the economy in general picks up," Yeatman said. "It's not as terrible as it used to be."

James Angelucci, general manager of Phillips Mushroom Farms, a third-generation family-owned company in Kennett, said in addition to restaurant demand he believes the Mushroom Council's marketing efforts promoting the nutritional benefits of mushrooms are paying off.

Mushrooms are served with burgers at fast-food chains, on pizza, in an omelet for breakfast or on steak at a high-end restaurant, he said. "Mushrooms are one of the few vegetables you can eat with every meal of the day and as a snack on pizza at night," Angelucci said.

Agritourism Improves Income of Rural Communities

A lot of people may have never heard the term "Agritourism," even though it's becoming more and more likely they've participated in it. Agritourism is basically any activity that brings visitors to a farm or ranch.

Sabrina Matteson, American Farm Bureau Federation community development specialist, said agricultural tourism has become an important alternative for improving the incomes and potential economic viability of small farms and rural communities.

"The growth of Agritourism is really important for both the consumer and farmers and ranchers because it's an opportunity for the consumer to see how food, fuel and fiber are created and it gives an opportunity for farmers and ranchers to share their story," Matteson said.

"There are farmers that are doing it because of the seasonal characteristic of farming," she added. "They may be doing a spring crop and a fall crop, but don't have activities on their

farm that they are busy with in the summer time. So they may decide they're going to do trail rides. There are lots of pick-your-own opportunities and sometimes the farmer will create more of a festival atmosphere so that there will be educational opportunities and hay rides. There are corn mazes and with the return of school there are lots of opportunities for school groups to go and visit a farm and to pick apples or pumpkins."