

AG ISSUES UPDATE
Edited by Brad Hollabaugh
August, 2012

PSU Dean Bruce McPheron Accepts Promotion To Post At Ohio State

The Ohio State University has named Bruce McPheron as its next vice president for agriculture administration and dean of the College of Food, Agriculture and Environmental Sciences. McPheron, a Buckeye State native and Ohio State University graduate, is currently the dean of the College of Agriculture Sciences at Penn State.

Dean McPheron moved to Penn State University 24 years ago and has proven to be an effective leader for Penn State while supporting and advancing Ag research and extension. As Dean of the College of Agricultural Sciences at Penn State, he has applied his talents as a skilled leader while the College has worked through strategic restructuring in recent years in the face of tough state budgets.

Dean McPheron has been a good friend to the Agriculture in general and the tree fruit industry and has been a champion for the Penn State Fruit Research and Extension Center at Biglerville. We will surely miss his presence at Penn State. However, the opportunity to return to his alma mater in a new position is a new opportunity to advance his career and move back to his alma mater and closer to his family. "Best of luck to you, Dr. McPheron, as you continue your journey next door in Ohio!!"

Problems with Stink Bugs? Penn State Researchers Want to Know

Investigators are keeping an eye on the movement of stink bugs and are asking homeowners and farmers to help. Researchers in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences have developed a website to gather data so they can estimate stink bug damage. People who identify brown-marmorated stink bugs in their homes or agricultural operations can find more information about the insects and report local populations by visiting <http://www.stinkbug-info.org>. Farmers, nursery operators and homeowners can report damage they received last year or in 2010, as well as damage from 2012.

"Through the reports of contributors, we will get a sense of where the populations have been the worst," John Tooker, assistant professor and Extension specialist in entomology. "We also get a sense of where the populations are at different times of the year and where they're moving."

The stink bug website was developed at the request of the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and in collaboration with Penn State's Center for Environmental Informatics. Maps on the stink bug site showed a concentration in southern Pennsylvania. Tooker said the worst stink bug infestations have been in Adams, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Lancaster, Lebanon and York counties. In 2010, the insects also were common around Pittsburgh and Philadelphia.

In the past 15 months, there have been nearly 200 locations of stink bug populations mapped on the website in Pennsylvania, but contributions also have come from Missouri, Texas,

Maryland and even as far away as the state of Washington. A long-term goal for the site is the ability to see populations moving between crops, Tooker said.

Pennsylvania Growers Watch for Destructive New Spotted Wing Drosophila Fruit Fly

As fruits and berries ripen around the Commonwealth, farmers are watching warily for a tiny pest that could be a big problem for their fruit: non-native subspecies of fruit fly called the Spotted Wing Drosophila.

Unlike most fruit flies, which attack rotting fruit, the Spotted Wing Drosophila damages fresh, ripe fruit by laying eggs under the fruit skin while it is still on the tree, vine or plant. While some pesticides can kill the flies, no-spray operations may have to resort to covering berries with netting or introducing predatory insects.

"We're concerned about it. I think everyone who grows soft fruit is concerned about it," said Thomas Clark, co-owner of Clarkdale Fruit Farm in Deerfield, Pennsylvania. "People don't like bugs in their fruit."

Clark said that while he has not found any trace of the flies in his orchards, he is keeping a vigilant eye since he learned the pests were found 30 miles away at the University of Massachusetts' Cold Spring Orchard in Belchertown in early July. He set out fruit fly traps that use vinegar to lure the flies into a container. If the bugs hit his orchards, he'll know about it. "We're just going to keep hoping it doesn't happen," Clark said, adding that he has not ruled out using pesticides if the flies do infest the orchards.

UMass Extension Fruit Specialist Sonia Schloemann said the Spotted Wing Drosophila was found in parts of the state after Tropical Storm Irene last September, leading some experts to believe the fly may have been brought to the area on the storm front.

According to the UMass Extension, the Asian fly was first found in the mainland United States in 2008 in California and has been moving east. "Now we know we have it all along the East Coast, so it will become one of the many challenges growers absorb into their management systems," Schloemann said.

Certain pesticides can be good weapons against the flies, but farmers with no-spray or chemical-free operations have fewer options. Some organic pesticides have also been effective, the Extension reports. But other recommendations for preventing infestations include putting fine netting over berries or fruit or introducing predators or pathogens that could reduce the fly population.

For all farms, harvesting the fruit as soon as it is ripe means the flies have fewer targets to attack. At Bird Haven Blueberry Farm in Southampton, owner John Pipiras said he is trying to do just that. "We told people to come and get 'em before the critters do," he said of the pick-your-own blueberries. "Getting what's ripe off the fields helps with any situation, whether it's fruit flies, blueberry maggots or whatever else." For information on how to identify or prevent the Spotted Wing Drosophila, visit www.extension.umass.edu/vegetable.

Penn State Partners with Agriculture Safety Website

Penn State has partnered with other land grant institutions to develop a new farm-safety section for a national agriculture website created by cooperative extension agents. The online resource covers critical agriculture safety questions, such as grain bin entrapments, cattle hauling, ATV safety and confined space hazards.

The website, http://extension.org/farm_safety_and_health, offers easily searchable information by topic, and contains information that all agriculture producers, regardless of experience, can find useful, according to Dennis Murphy, a professor of Agriculture Safety and Health at Penn State.

Federal Lawmakers Pass Bill to Protect Family Farms

Members of the House of Representatives have recently adopted a bill, known as the Preserving America's Family Farms Act, which would prevent the federal government from enacting onerous regulations on youth working on farms.

In a letter to lawmakers a coalition of agriculture organizations, including the American Farm Bureau, said a proposal by the Department of Labor to curtail the types of work youth could perform on farms would have been detrimental to the agriculture industry. While DOL has backed away from those proposed regulations, the family farms act would preserve the ability of youth to gain work and education experience on the farm.

"While we all respect the obligations and responsibilities of DOL to ensure the safety of youth working on farms, we believe that the approaches taken need to be well-reasoned and not detrimental to the family farm or the youth participating in farm work," AFBF and the other groups said in the letter.

Bill to Expand Farm Exemption from Spill Control Requirements Passes House

The U.S. House recently approved legislation to expand the types of farms exempted from the Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasure rule as imposed by the Environmental Protection Agency.

The current SPCC rule requires farms with aboveground fuel storage tanks with a total storage capacity of greater than 1,320 gallons to develop written, certified plans to control fuel spills, which include "secondary" systems like dikes or impoundments to capture initial overflows or other discharges from the tank.

The bill passed by the House would allow farms with an aggregate storage capacity of 10,000 gallons or less from having to comply with SPCC regulations. Those farms must also have no history of spills. The bill now heads to the Senate for consideration.

Support for 2010 Compromise on Estate Tax Urged

AFBF and other members of the Family Business Estate Tax Coalition recently wrote to House members expressing support for legislation that would extend the 2010 compromise reached on the estate tax. "Congressional action on the estate tax is urgently needed to

prevent it from ensnaring thousands of new and unsuspecting family-owned businesses in 2013,” the groups wrote in a letter.

The goal of the FBETC has always been full repeal of the estate tax and the coalition still believes this is the best solution to protect all family-owned businesses from the estate tax. At a minimum, the FBETC supports maintaining current estate tax policy, with an exemption level at \$5 million and the maximum rate of 35 percent, until a permanent extension of current policy is enacted.

Produce Inspection Program Survives Ax

The nation’s largest produce safety testing program has been spared from the budget ax. The program’s funding was slashed in President Obama’s budget proposal earlier this year, and the program, which screens thousands of produce samples for E. coli, listeria and other bacteria, was at risk of being eliminated.

Upon pressure from consumer groups and members of Congress such as Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.), a longtime food safety advocate, the Food and Drug Administration has agreed to extend the \$4.3 million a year program through December. DeLauro has pledged to find the money to extend it beyond year’s end.

In other food safety news, several consumer groups reportedly have criticized the administration for taking so long to implement the Food Safety Modernization Act, enacted in 2010. The law increased inspection of imported foods and authorized FDA to recall food rather than relying on companies’ voluntary recalls. The Office of Management and Budget says the delay is due to the routine amount of time it takes to obtain public comment and put new rules in place.

Drought Watch Declared for Some PA Counties; Pennsylvania Farm Bureau Creates Weather Relief Help Center

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection has placed a number of counties in Pennsylvania under a drought watch. The designation for Allegheny, Beaver, Butler, Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Fayette, Forest, Greene, Lawrence, Mercer, Somerset, Venango, Warren and Washington counties means residents in those areas are asked to conserve water usage.

Producers are reminded to check with their crop insurance provider before destroying any damaged crops. Farmers should consult with their crop insurance company, and local FSA office staff for more information.

As a result of these extreme weather conditions, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau has developed a special website to chronicle information that will be useful to producers faced with weather damage because of high temperatures and lack of rainfall. The site, www.pfb.com/help-center, will contain the latest information from state and federal sources on the help available to farmers coping with crop loss this season.

Agriculture Secretary Vilsack Announces New Efforts to Assist Farmers and Ranchers Impacted by Drought

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack recently announced new flexibility and assistance in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's major conservation programs to get much-needed help to farmers, as the most wide-spread drought in seven decades intensifies in the United States.

The new assistance uses the Secretary of Agriculture's existing authority to help create and encourage flexibility within four USDA programs: the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), and the Federal Crop Insurance Program.
Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

Vilsack also announced plans to encourage crop insurance companies to provide a short grace period for farmers on unpaid insurance premiums, as some farm families can be expected to struggle to make ends meet at the close of the crop year.

USDA agencies have been working for weeks with state and local officials, as well as individuals, businesses, farmers and ranchers, as they begin the process of helping to get people back on their feet. For more information about all the resources available from Vilsack's announcement, please visit www.usda.gov/drought.

New Smartphone Applications Helps Preschoolers Eat Vegetables

Parents who are perplexed by their preschooler's dislike of vegetables may find help in a science-based video game that USDA-funded scientists and their colleagues are creating for parents to play on smartphones.

When complete, "Kiddio: Food Fight!" will give parents of preschoolers a fun, interactive way to learn some of the best approaches for getting their kids to eat more vegetables, according to Tom Baranowski, who leads the team that is developing the app.

The game will offer users a series of short, interactive episodes that feature "Kiddio," an appealing preschooler who doesn't like vegetables. Parents can customize the game so that Kiddio's temperament matches that of their child.

In the course of each episode, parents will be able to select multiple options for influencing Kiddio's eating habits. Some choices create effective, "teachable moments," such as when the parent says, "That's a really tasty veggie." Other choices may express a perhaps ineffective "firm discipline" approach in which the parent tells Kiddio, "You will taste it before you leave the table!"

The videogame project draws upon five studies that a group of Houston scientists have conducted over the past decade. These studies, involving thousands of parents, kids, and nutrition-related professionals, are examples of what has become known as "behavioral nutrition," a comparatively new scientific discipline that has roots in both psychology and nutrition.