

AG ISSUES UPDATE
Edited by Brad Hollabaugh
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Immigration Reform

Perhaps this is the year it will get done.

Immigration Reform has been the hot topic in Washington and Ag groups across the nation are taking the topic to Congress in a coordinated fashion. USApple is active in several national coalitions including the Agricultural Workforce Coalition, the Agriculture Coalition for Immigration Reform, the National Council of Agricultural Employers, and the H-2B Coalition.

USApple's top policy priority is to enact meaningful agricultural labor reform into law and prevent onerous new regulation and enforcement mechanisms on apple employers. USApple opposes mandatory E-Verify legislation unless it contains viable agricultural labor provisions which address both the current and future workforce.

The Coalition has released its framework proposal that will include both an earned adjustment in status for current experienced farm workers and a new program to ensure that producers continue to have access to a workforce as current agricultural employees move on to other jobs. A key to the framework will be ensuring that it meets the needs of all of agriculture—both those employers with seasonal labor needs and those who provide year-round employment opportunities. The American Farm Bureau Federation is also a member of this coalition.

On Tuesday, February 8, the House Judiciary Committee held the first in what is promised to be a series of hearings on immigration reform and border enforcement. Chairman Bob Goodlatte (R-Va.) opened the hearing, saying that "this year, Congress will engage in a momentous debate on immigration. This will be a massive undertaking with significant implications for the future direction of our nation. As such, we must move forward methodically and evaluate this issue in stages, taking care to fully vet the pros and cons of each piece."

Goodlatte is a former Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee with significant apple production in his rural Virginia district. He went on to say, "U.S. laws erect unnecessary hurdles for farmers who put food on America's tables. Our agriculture guestworker program is simply unworkable and needs to be reformed."

Though the hearing did not focus specifically on agriculture, one witness suggested that growers who have trouble finding an adequate workforce should plant other -- less labor intensive crops." This suggestion was met with harsh criticism from Republicans and Democrats on the Committee. (Clearly, apple growers couldn't pull out their trees one year and plant another crop that year's for harvest by combine!) With many new Members of Congress, there is much education to do.

Meetings with Congressmen are planned in Washington in March. Immigration Reform will once again be the top discussion point. (*USApple Weekly Report*, February 8, 2013).

Farm Bill

Although the 2008 Farm Bill was extended, the debate continues on how the new Farm Bill will be configured. The Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI, which has provided critical support to fight the invasive Brown Marmorated Stink Bug, is at risk as are many other programs.

US Apple will continue to support policies that "encourage competitiveness through private investment, opportunities to increase profitability in the marketplace, and incentives for growers who are committed to better serving consumer needs." These principles were built into the 2008 Farm Bill. It will require a strong lobby from the Specialty Crops industry to preserve them in the next revision.

Minor Crop Farmer Alliance Meeting - Pests, Bees, Crop Protection

At the beginning of February, Mark Seetin, Director, Regulatory and Industry Affairs for US Apple, participated in a meeting of the Minor Crop Farmer Alliance (MCFA). USApple is a founding member of MCFA, whose stated mission is to "address legislative and administrative policies to ensure the continued availability of crop protection chemicals for minor use crops. Critical issues discussed at the meeting included:

- 1) USDA Office of Pest Management Policy (OPMP) - Office Director Dr. Cheryl Kunickis reported on their important work as an advocate for crop protection products important for agriculture.
 - a) The Spotted Wing Drosophila continues to cause damage in the western U.S. and is moving to eastern fruit growing areas.
 - b) The brown marmorated stink bug, has now expanded to 40 states and caused significant damage in New York in 2012, a state not harmed significantly in previous years. New York and Michigan have joined in seeking Section 18 approval for bifenthrin and dinotefuran use for control on apples this year.
 - c) USDA's conference on pollinators last November found a growing body of research findings and scientists now suggest that it is increasingly clear pesticides alone are not responsible for bee losses (Colony Collapse Disorder, CCD). Bee nutrition, parasites and diseases need to be considered in identifying ways to improve pollinator health. Seetin will continue work as a member of EPA's Pollinator Protection Working Group (PPWG) in order to forward recommendations to the agency on how to improve pollinator health.
- 2) IR-4 Minor crop pesticide research - Work is currently being done on over 50 compounds - insecticides, herbicides and fungicides for EPA label approval. USDA's IR-4 Project was created in 1993 to encourage approval of pest management tools for specialty crop growers by developing research data to support new EPA tolerances for pesticides. Because specialty crops represent such a small market for pesticide manufacturers, without the work of IR-4, many crop protection chemicals used by growers would not have been labeled by EPA.
- 3) Endangered Species Act (ESA) - Several environmentalist lawsuits, which threaten pesticide use, continue against EPA, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the Fish and Wildlife Service (FSW). Work continues with the Services to get them to utilize pesticide use data from grower organizations in their Biological Opinions (BiOps) process. (*USApple Weekly Report*, February 8, 2013).

Pennsylvania Congressman to Chair Transportation and Infrastructure Committee

U.S. Representative Bill Shuster (R-Blair) will chair the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee during the 113th Congress. Shuster has served on the committee since coming to Congress in 2001, including chairing two subcommittees.

Last year, Shuster played a critical role getting legislation passed that prohibits the federal government from withholding funds from states that choose to provide commonsense exemptions for agriculture transportation.

The federal transportation committee oversees a number of matters critical to agriculture producers, including ports, inland waterways and highways, airports and railroads. Shuster represents the 9th Congressional District of Pennsylvania, which stretches from Indiana to Chambersburg along the southern edge of the state.

Committee Chairs Named for State Legislative Session

Leaders of the state House and Senate have named chairs for their respective legislative committees for the 2013-2014 term of the General Assembly. Rep. John Maher, (R-Allegheny), will continue to chair the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee and Sen. Elder Vogel Jr. (R-Allegheny), has retained chairmanship of the Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee.

In the House, Rep. Ron Miller, (R-York), will chair the Environmental Resources and Energy Committee; Rep. Kerry Benninghoff, (R-Centre), will chair the Finance Committee; Rep. Martin Causer, (R-Cameron), will chair the Game and Fisheries Committee and Rep. Dick Hess, (R-Bedford,) will chair the Transportation Committee.

In the Senate, Gene Yaw, (R-Lycoming), will chair the Environmental Resources and Energy Committee; Mike Brubaker, (R-Lancaster), will chair the Finance Committee; Richard Alloway, (R-Franklin), will chair the Game & Fisheries Committee and John Rafferty Jr., (R-Montgomery), will chair the Transportation Committee.

CHEMSWEEP Available in 21 Counties in 2013

CHEMSWEEP, a program offered by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, will be available in 21 counties for 2013. The program allows agriculture businesses and pesticide applicators to dispose of unwanted pesticides.

In 2013, CHEMSWEEP will be available in Bedford, Berks, Blair, Bradford, Butler, Columbia, Cumberland, Delaware, Lackawanna, Lawrence, Luzerne, McKean, Montgomery, Montour, Northumberland, Snyder, Somerset, Sullivan, Union, Warren and York counties.

Licensed pesticide applicators, pesticide dealers and commercial applicators from designated counties are eligible to participate. Registration ends March 31. Independent contractors will collect and package all wastes. CHEMSWEEP will cover the disposal costs for the first 2,000 pounds per participant. Fees apply for disposal above that amount.

DMAP Can Help Farmers Control Deer Populations

Deer populations that get too large can cause serious problems on agriculture lands. An average deer will eat about 2,100 pounds of food and forage annually. Given that fact, large herds of deer can easily take a big chunk out of farm income.

Hunters have always been the most effective means of keeping deer populations under control. The Deer Management Assistance Program, known as DMAP, can help farmers control deer

populations. You can decide who does or does not hunt using a DMAP permit, or you can have the Game Commission distribute the permits through their automated licensing system.

To qualify, farmers must be the owner or lessee of private lands, and must be able to demonstrate that he or she is suffering crop or tree damage on the property. That property may be posted or un-posted.

DMAP coupons are then given to the property owner or lessee at a rate of one per five acres of cultivated lands, or one per 50 acres of forest. Property owners are then allowed to distribute those coupons to licensed hunters, who can then redeem the coupon for a DMAP antlerless deer harvest permit. Hunters have to pay the Game Commission the set fee for antlerless licenses. Each permit can be used to harvest one antlerless deer on the specific DMAP property enrolled in the program.

Permits to hunt under DMAP are only valid for the property for which they are issued. Hunters may use DMAP permits during any established deer-hunting (doe) season, but must also comply with the hunter harvest report and survey return requirements.

Farmers wishing to enroll in DMAP must do so by June 1. To enroll in DMAP you must contact the PA Game Commission regional office that serves your area immediately after deer seasons end. The PA Game Commission can also give you more information on the rules and regulations for DMAP.

Regional office information can be found at the following link:

<http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt?open=514&objID=562943&mode=2>.

Pennsylvania Farm Bureau Conducting Comprehensive Deer Damage Survey

Deer can cause thousands of dollars' worth of damage on Pennsylvania farms. And the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau is trying to get a better picture of the extent of deer damage in the state.

"Deer damage is a perennial issue on Pennsylvania farms, and can be a frequent source of frustration for producers," said Jeff Grove, PFB's Local Affairs Director. "Filling out this survey will help us determine the extent that farmers are being impacted. Even farmers who have little to no damage are encouraged to participate."

The survey, which is available on the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau website at www.pfb.com/deerdamagesurvey, asks producers how much their crops are damaged by deer, both in terms of acreage and monetary damages and what steps they take to minimize crop loss. PFB's Wildlife Committee will review all survey data.

Data may be used for policy discussions, and to give lawmakers and the Pennsylvania Game Commission a full picture of the problem. PFB will not include references to specific farms or farmers in any of those communications.