

AG ISSUES UPDATE

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USApple Updates

USApple Publishes New Tool for Growers: Pollinator BMPs for Apples

USApple is excited to announce its new publication, Pollinator Best Management Practices for Apples. The publication, created in partnership with the Honey Bee Health Coalition, can be viewed and downloaded at the following site: https://usapple.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/2022_03_18_USAPPLE_PollinatorReport_F.pdf. This new tool provides guidance for U.S. growers and regulators on pollinator protection in orchards. It considers practical production needs and suggests elements of an outreach and education program to foster adoption and implementation of identified practices. The goal of the work is to increase understanding within the U.S. apple growing community of the benefits and opportunities around protecting pollinators and furthering sustainability goals while also recognizing the need to protect the crop from pest damage.

USApple Capitol Hill Day Returns

On March 9, apple leaders from nine states traveled to Washington, D.C. for a fast-paced day of in-person meetings on Capitol Hill. In total, attendees met with nearly 40 offices, advocating for agriculture labor reform, strong export markets and funding for key Farm Bill programs.

Key Administration Trade Positions Remain Unfilled

Last week, Elaine Trevino withdrew her name for consideration for the post of Chief Agriculture Trade Negotiator at the office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR). President Biden nominated Trevino last October, but the process stalled, and a Senate confirmation hearing was never scheduled. The absence of a confirmed individual for this important post is problematic as it means that there is not a high-level Presidential appointee advocating for agriculture in USTR-led trade talks.

In addition, a nominee has not been announced for Under Secretary for Trade -- the top trade position at USDA. The acting Under Secretary for Trade, Jason Hafemeister, spoke to the USApple's Board of Directors earlier this month. USApple continues to make the case that retaliatory tariffs are hurting the industry and export markets and opportunities must be strengthened and expanded.

Crop Insurance Webinar Replay Link

For those of you who missed our webinar about USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) proposed changes for the new 2024 Apple Crop Insurance Policy, search the following link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/d669m0kjqxlqvqq3/video1787358557.mp4?dl=0> to download the replay link. The public has until April 15 to provide comments to RMA on the proposed changes.

Farm Bureau updates

USDA Announces Plan for \$250 Million Investment to Support American-Made Fertilizer

WASHINGTON – The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced last week that it will support additional fertilizer production for American farmers to address rising costs and spur competition.

The USDA will make available \$250 million through a new grant program this summer that supports independent, innovative and sustainable American fertilizer production to supply American farmers. Additionally, to address growing competition concerns in the agricultural supply chain, USDA will launch a public inquiry seeking information regarding seeds and agricultural inputs, fertilizer and retail markets.

Fertilizer prices continue to be on the rise and have more than doubled in the past year due to many factors, including the war in Ukraine, a limited supply of the relevant minerals and high energy costs, high global demand and agricultural commodity prices, reliance on fertilizer imports and lack of competition in the industry.

The United States is a major importer and is largely dependent on foreign fertilizer. The US is the second or third top importer for each of the three major components of fertilizer. The top producers of the major components of fertilizer include China, Russia, Canada and Morocco, with Belarus also providing a significant share of potash.

The USDA will use funds from the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) set aside in September for market disruptions to develop a grant program that provides financing to bring new, independent domestic production capacity on-line – similar to the recently announced meat and poultry grants that are designed to promote competition and resilience in that sector.

The new program will support fertilizer production that is independent, made in America, innovative, sustainable and farmer focused. Details on the application process will be announced this summer, with the first awards expected before the end of 2022.

Other Source Updates

New Resource Includes Five Experienced Mentors

HARRISBURG, Pa. — Pennsylvania's agriculture industry has a new resource available to help farmers. The PA Agriculture Mentor Program includes five mentors with extensive agricultural backgrounds to assist beginning farmers, agribusiness entrepreneurs and farmers in troubleshooting new strategies and ideas for their farm businesses.

Spearheaded by a group of Pennsylvania agricultural organizations with an interest in the future of agriculture, the program leverages SCORE, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and resource partner of the U.S. Small Business Development Center. The mentoring is free and confidential.

“The voice and wisdom of an experienced mentor can be one of your most valuable assets in a new operation,” Pennsylvania Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding said. “The Agricultural Business Development Center [agriculture.pa.gov] was created under the PA Farm Bill to connect the next generation of farmers to the resources they need to feed Pennsylvania’s future. We are pleased to support the new Ag Mentor Program and are grateful for the generosity of this group of mentors who are willing to share their time and expertise.”

Mentors in the PA Agriculture Mentor Program:

- **John Berry, Emmaus, PA** – John is a former Penn State Extension educator who spent more than 20 years helping farmers on a variety of marketing and financial management topics. Known nationally for his retail farm marketing expertise, he is an internationally certified Farm Business Transition Coordinator. Prior to joining Extension, John had a 20-year dairy farming career. In retirement, John works seasonally for a pick-your-own orchard, food and agritourism business in his local community and enjoys volunteering on USAID foreign assignments.
- **Richard Crouse, Biglerville, PA** – Rick was raised on a tree fruit-growing operation and spent summers in college working as an orchard specialist at the Penn State Fruit Research Laboratory in Biglerville. Rick dedicated 30 years with the Farm Service Agency (FSA) as a loan officer, manager and specialist throughout Pennsylvania. The last seven years of his career, he served as a business development specialist with AgChoice Farm Credit in Adams County.
- **Jim Hoge, Waterford, PA** – Jim is retired from AgChoice Farm Credit, after 34 years as a loan officer and regional manager in western Pennsylvania. As a loan officer, he worked with dairy, grapes, and forest products customers. He often served as a trusted advisor for start-up and expansion projects. Prior to his AgChoice career, Jim and his brother operated a small dairy farm in Washington County. Jim and his wife currently have a small farm, growing blueberries for pick-your-own and local farm markets.
- **Winifred McGee, Elizabethtown, PA** – Winifred has a passion for helping farm and food businesses get started and currently works part-time for University of Scranton Small Business Development Center (SBDC). She is formerly with Penn State Extension and spent more than 30 years teaching topics such as business planning, financial analysis and business feasibility.
- **Alan Zepp, New Oxford, PA** – Alan has a lifelong background in the dairy industry. He operated his own dairy farm for more than 30 years, and then helped other Pennsylvania dairy farmers as risk management coordinator at the Center for Dairy Excellence. Alan now operates a crop farm and raises heifers for a neighboring farm.

Individuals seeking mentorship can apply online at www.score.org. Within the application, note your involvement in a farm or food business, and you may also identify a specific mentor you would like to work with.

To learn more about the PA Agriculture Mentor Program and its mentors, visit <https://pafarmlink.org/mentor/>.

The following organizations supported the development and launch of the PA Agriculture Mentor Program: AgChoice Farm Credit, Center for Dairy Excellence, Farm Progress, Pasa Sustainable

Agriculture, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, Pennsylvania Farm Link and Penn State Extension.
– *Morning Ag Clips- Pennsylvania Edition March 23, 2022*

Agricultural Finance: USDA Amends Farm Loan Program, Allows ‘Equitable Relief’ for Noncompliant Borrowers and Higher Loan Limits

On March 9, 2022, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) published a final rule in the Federal Register amending the agency’s Farm Loan Programs (FLP) as mandated and authorized by the 2018 Farm Bill (87 FR 13117). The rule implements several changes to Farm Ownership loans (FOL) and Farm Operating loans (OL). Among several changes, the final rule (1) amends the three-year farming experience requirement for FOLs to allow a loan applicant to substitute “acceptable experience,” for two of the three years; (2) increases the Direct FOL loan limit to \$600,000, increases the Direct OL limit to \$400,000, and increases both FOL and OL Guaranteed loan limits to \$1,750,000; (3) increases the rate for third-party provided FSA Guaranteed FOLs and OLs from 90% to 95% (of \$1,825,000—the \$1,750,000 limit) for qualified beginning farmers and socially disadvantaged farmers; and (4) allows FSA to provide equitable relief, as deemed appropriated by the agency, to certain borrowers “who are non-compliant with program requirements due to good faith reliance on a material action of, advice of, or non-action from an FSA official.” Also announced by FSA, the rule provides additional FLP benefits for veterans, allows emergency loans for borrowers who have received debt restructuring, and expands the issues allowable under the Certified Mediation Program, including issues relating to the national organic program, family farm transitions, farmer-neighbor conflicts, credit counseling, and issues deemed appropriate by a State Department of Agriculture. The final rule was effective upon publication. -*Penn State Agricultural Law Weekly Review March 11, 2022*

Pesticides/Herbicides: Eighth Circuit Allows Suit to Proceed Against EPA for Chlorpyrifos Tolerance Revocation

On March 16, 2022, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit issued an order dismissing for lack of jurisdiction a suit challenging the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) revocation of all chlorpyrifos food tolerances and denying the petitioner producer organizations’ motion to consolidate multiple cases as moot. *RRVSG Assoc., et al v. Michael Regan, et al*, No. 22-1294. However, on March 15, 2022, in the petitioner’s parallel litigation filed on February 28, 2022, the Eighth Circuit issued an order denying the petitioner’s motion for partial stay pending review but exercising jurisdiction over the dispute and allowing the case to proceed. *RRVSG Assoc., et al v. Michael Regan, et al*, No. 22-1422. For background, see ALWR—Feb. 25, 2022, “EPA Issues Order Denying All Objections to Final Rule Revoking all Chlorpyrifos Tolerances.” – *Penn State Agricultural Law Weekly Review March 18, 2022*