

## **AG ISSUES UPDATE**

**Edited by Sara Hricko**

**December-January 2026**

### ***USApple Updates***

#### **Ag Labor Champion Newhouse Announces Retirement**

In December, Congressman Dan Newhouse (R-WA) announced he will not seek re-election. A hops farmer by trade, Newhouse represents a significant concentration of Washington's apple growers, including those in the Yakima Valley. He has been a leading advocate for agricultural labor reform, spearheading bipartisan efforts that resulted in the Farm Workforce Modernization Act passing the House twice. He has also played a key role in advancing the priorities of the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance and strengthening export opportunities. He has spoken several times at USApple's Capitol Hill Day events.

We will continue to work closely with him and his staff through the remainder of his term. We will closely monitor the election in Washington's 4th District and will prioritize early engagement with candidates and, ultimately, the next Member of Congress to ensure the continued representation of apple growers' interests.

#### **100+ House Members Urge Immediate Specialty Crop Farm Aid**

A bipartisan group of more than 100 House Members is urging Congress and the Administration to deliver immediate and equitable farm aid for specialty crop producers.

The letter states that "during the previous Trump and Biden Administrations, programs were created and adjusted accordingly to ensure specialty crop growers had access to assistance as quickly as possible. During these challenging times for producers of all types of farming commodities, we ask for your leadership and assistance to elevate this priority once again."

The effort was led by the House Specialty Crop Caucus and the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance (SCFBA). USApple plays a leadership role in the SCFBA and worked to garner support for the effort — nearly all House members with apples signed the letter. The press release with a link to the letter will be posted here later today, once it is publicly available.

## **USApple Weighs in on New AEW Framework**

This week, USApple submitted comments to the Department of Labor supporting the agency's proposed wage methodology for the H-2A program, while urging several refinements.

Under the interim final rule, each state would have two wage levels – Level I and Level II – based on job skills and qualifications listed in growers' job orders. Employers providing free housing to H-2A workers would also see their hourly wage reduced through a housing adjustment.

Importantly, the Farm Labor Survey has been discontinued and no longer serves as the basis for the AEW – an outcome USApple has long advocated. Early analysis indicates that new AEWs in major apple-producing states should decrease in 2026, with the size of the reduction varying by job classification.

While USApple generally supports the new methodology, we identified several areas where additional guidance and clarity are needed, as reflected in our submitted comments.

## **USApple and 500+ Organizations Back USMCA**

USApple joined more than 500 business, agriculture, and chamber organizations in a letter urging U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer to preserve and strengthen the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA). The coalition emphasized USMCA's essential role in supporting American jobs and maintaining reliable export markets.

Mexico and Canada remain the top two export destinations for U.S. apples. In the 2024–25 crop year, growers shipped 15.5 million bushels to Mexico and 7 million bushels to Canada - an export value of \$515 million. Tariff-free access and the agreement's predictability are critical to maintaining these markets.

USApple is working closely with partner coalitions to ensure USMCA remains a top policy priority for the Trump Administration.

## **Morning Ag Clips**

### **USDA Launches New Regenerative Pilot Program**

WASHINGTON — On Dec. 10, 2025, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke L. Rollins, alongside U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., and Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services

Administrator Dr. Mehmet Oz announced a \$700 million Regenerative Pilot Program to help American farmers adopt practices that improve soil health, enhance water quality, and boost long-term productivity, all while strengthening America's food and fiber supply.

Building off the Make Our Children Healthy Again Strategy released in September, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is also investing in research on the connection between regenerative agriculture and public health, as well as developing public health messaging explaining this connection.

"In September, under President Trump's leadership, we released the MAHA Strategy Report, which includes a full section on soil health and land stewardship," said HHS Secretary Kennedy. "Today's regenerative farming announcement directly advances that deliverable. If we intend to Make America Healthy Again, we must begin by restoring the health of our soil."

### **Protecting Soil and Reducing Production Costs**

In response to the Dust Bowl in the 1930s, Congress created the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to help people help the land and improve conservation of the nation's soil and water resources.

This action led to improved soil health and natural resources management which, in turn, has led to increased productivity. Between 1948 and 2021, total U.S. farm production increased 190% while total farm inputs—such as land, labor, and water—decreased 2% in the same period.

However, current conservation programs at [USDA](#) have become overly burdensome and farmers are bogged down with red tape whenever they try to adopt soil health and regenerative agriculture practices. Even with the improved soil health since the creation of NRCS, USDA data shows that farmers recently reported that 25% of acres had water-driven erosion concerns and 16% of acres had wind-driven erosion concerns.

The Regenerative Pilot Program directly addresses these challenges by cutting administrative burdens for producers, expanding access to new and beginning farmers, and boosting yields and long-term soil resilience across operations.

### **About the Regenerative Pilot Program**

Administered by NRCS, this new Regenerative Pilot Program delivers a streamlined, outcome-based conservation model—empowering producers to plan and implement whole-farm regenerative practices through a single application. The initiative highlights USDA's commitment to putting Farmers First and advancing the Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) agenda by building a healthier, more resilient food system.

In FY2026, the Regenerative Pilot Program will focus on whole-farm planning that addresses every major resource concern—soil, water, and natural vitality—under a single conservation framework. [USDA](#) is dedicating \$400 million through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and \$300 million through the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) to fund this first year of regenerative agriculture projects.

Producers can now bundle multiple regenerative practices into one application, streamlining the process and increasing flexibility for operations. The program is designed for both beginning and advanced producers, ensuring availability for all farmers ready to take the next step in regenerative agriculture.

### **How to Apply**

Farmers and ranchers interested in regenerative agriculture are encouraged to apply through their local NRCS Service Center by their state's ranking dates for consideration in FY2026 funding. Applications for both EQIP and CSP can now be submitted under the new single regenerative application process. -Dec. 10<sup>th</sup>, 2025

## **Trump is Giving Farmers \$12B in Aid**

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump announced a \$12 billion farm aid package on Monday — a boost to farmers who have struggled to sell their crops while getting hit by rising costs after the president raised tariffs on China as part of a broader trade war.

He unveiled the plan Monday afternoon at a White House roundtable with Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins, lawmakers from farm states, and farmers who thanked him for the help.

Rollins put the immediate value of the program at \$11 billion — money that the White House said will offer one-time payments to row-crop farmers. Another \$1 billion will be put aside for specialty crops as the administration works to better understand the circumstances for those farmers, Rollins said. The aid will move by the end of February, she said.

Farmers have backed Trump politically, but his aggressive trade policies and frequently changing tariff rates have come under increasing scrutiny because of the impact on the agricultural sector and because of broader consumer worries.

The aid is the administration's latest effort to defend Trump's economic stewardship and answer voter angst about rising costs. Trump has been dismissive of the affordability issue at times, but in December, he is set to travel to Pennsylvania to talk about how his administration is trying to address a concern that is important for voters.

## USDA to Expand Crop Insurance Access

WASHINGTON — U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke L. Rollins today [Dec. 5, 2025] announced major updates to federal crop insurance, reducing red tape for farmers, modernizing long-standing policies, and expanding access to critical risk protection beginning with the 2026 crop year. The Expanding Access to Risk Protection (EARP) Final Rule streamlines requirements across multiple crops, responds to producer feedback, and strengthens USDA's commitment to putting America's farmers first.

### Reducing Regulatory Burdens

#### Improving Land Access Through Prevented Planting Relief

- Removes the “insured” requirement from the “1 in 4” rule for prevented planting payments. Producers must still show the land was planted and harvested (or adjusted for an insurable cause of loss) in one of the previous four years.

#### Streamlining Production Reporting

- Allows policyholders switching Approved Insurance Providers (AIPs) to submit production reports directly to their new provider, reducing confusion and paperwork.

#### Expanding Direct Marketing Options

- Allows insurance under the Dollar Plan for direct-marketed fresh market tomatoes and peppers beginning with the 2027 crop year, reflecting specialty crop business practices in Northeastern states.

#### Simplifying Dispute Resolution

- In accordance with Executive Order 14192, Unleashing Prosperity Through Deregulation, removes the “automatic nullification” rule and shifts fact-finding authority to the courts, reducing administrative burdens on policyholders and AIPs.

#### Deregulating Coverage Dates

- Removes termination, cancellation, and end-of-insurance dates from federal regulations and places them in policy provisions, enabling more flexible, county-level updates.

#### Additional Policy Updates

#### One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA) Implementation

- Incorporates provisions from Manager's Bulletin 25-006.

- Extends beginning farmer and rancher eligibility from 5 to 10 crop years.
- Updates additional premium subsidy rates: 15% (years 1–2), 13% (year 3), 11% (year 4), and 10% (years 5–10).

#### Revenue Protection Clarifications

- Establishes that harvest prices will equal projected prices when insufficient data prevents use of the approved methodology.
- Creates a reimbursement process for policyholders who paid additional revenue protection premiums in such cases.

#### Effective Dates and Public Comment

The EARP Final Rule became effective Nov. 30, 2025, for crops with a contract change date on or after that date (2026 crop year) and for the 2027 crop year as specified. USDA will accept public comments until January 27, 2026.

#### Additional Information

Producers should contact their local crop insurance agent or visit the RMA website for guidance on how these updates may affect coverage options.