

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:**April 17, 2000**

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LAST WEEK:

FREEDOM TO E-FILE ACT – The House of Representatives passed the Freedom to E-File Act on Monday, by a vote of 397-1. The bill (S. 777) would allow farmers and ranchers to file paperwork with the U.S. Department of Agriculture electronically. The House-passed version of the Freedom to E-File largely substitutes the legislative language contained in H.R. 852 for the text of S. 777. As passed by the House, S. 777 requires the Secretary of Agriculture to establish an electronic filing and retrieval system to enable the public to file with USDA all required paperwork electronically. The bill would also allow the interested public to have access to information on farm programs, quarterly trade, economic and production reports and other similar information. The bill requires that, within 180 days of enactment, the Secretary of Agriculture establish user-friendly electronic filing and retrieval system, which would allow farmers to download forms from the Internet and submit completed and modified forms. Within two years, the completed system must be fully operational, allowing farmers to retrieve and file all relevant forms with USDA.

CLEAN WATER PROJECTS – On Wednesday, the House passed two measures authorizing funds for clean water projects. The first bill, H.R. 2328, passed by a vote of 420-5, would reauthorize the Clean Lakes Program, created under the Water Pollution Control Act of 1972. As amended in committee, the bill would authorize the program at \$50 million a year for fiscal years 2000 through 2005. It would also increase by \$10 million, to \$25 million, the authorization for a study of acid rain's impact on lakes. The Clean Lakes Program provides financial and technical assistance to states for improving the water quality of public lakes. The other measure, H.R. 3039, would authorize money for efforts to clean up the Chesapeake Bay, the largest estuary in the United States. The legislation would authorize \$30 million a year from fiscal 2000 through 2005 to continue the cleanup program, which is composed of local, state, regional and federal government agencies and private organizations. Their agenda includes monitoring, managing and restoring the bay's ecosystem. The bill would also require federal facilities to participate in watershed planning and restoration activities and require a study of the state of the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem and a study of the Chesapeake Bay program's effect on this ecosystem. Both measures were amended by voice vote to include language, offered by Rep. James A. Traficant, Jr., D-OH, that would encourage the purchase of American made products from funds provided in the bill.

COASTAL RECREATIONAL WATERS – The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee approved legislation, S. 522, designed as a public right-to-know about coastal water quality. The bill, sponsored by Sen. Frank Lautenberg, D-NJ, was approved by a vote of 17-1, with Sen. George Voinovich, R-OH, the only lawmaker opposing the legislation. The proposal would require the Environmental Protection Agency to establish uniform testing and monitoring procedures to detect pathogens and floating debris in coastal waters that pose a public health risk. The States would then incorporate those guidelines in setting up their own monitoring systems. Information about possible hazards would then be released to the public. The Committee also approved H.R. 999, a similar bill, which was introduced by Rep. Brian Bilbray, R-CA, and passed the House last year.

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FARM POLICY FIELD HEARINGS – House Agriculture Committee Chairman, Larry Combest (R-TX) and Ranking Member Charlie Stenholm (D-TX) have announced the schedule of farm policy hearings in 10 cities in regions from March through May, encouraging producers to submit detailed proposals for agriculture policy. Although each hearing may last for up to four hours, full discussion of producers' plans and Committee Members' questions will limit the number of witnesses who can testify at the hearings. Producers may be invited to offer testimony as a witness, or if not selected, producers may either submit specific views for the record, or e-mail informal comments to the Committee. To be considered as a potential witness at the hearing, producers should include information about their agricultural experience and their farming operations. The Committee will select witnesses who are qualified to provide specific testimony about federal farm policy, and answer questions posed by Agriculture Committee Members about policy alternatives.

The schedule for the Farm Policy Field Hearings are as follows:

Monday, May 1 Sacramento, California Heidrick Ag History Center (Woodland, California) 8:30 a.m. Pacific Time	Tuesday, May 2 Sioux Falls, South Dakota Augustana College 8:30 a.m. Central Time	Friday, May 12 Boise, Idaho City Council Building 10:00 a.m. Mountain Time
	Saturday, May 13 Peoria, Illinois Peoria Civic Center 8:30 a.m. Central Time	

