

WEEKLY LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR: May 8, 2000

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LAST WEEK:

SENATE AGRICULTURE APPROPRIATIONS – On Thursday, May 4, the Agriculture, Rural Development and Related Agencies Subcommittee (Chairman Cochran, R-Miss.) of the Senate Appropriations Committee marked up funding levels for agriculture agencies and programs for Fiscal Year 2001. Funding for Conservation Operations was set at \$714,000,000, an increase of \$53.3 million. NRCS Legislative Affairs staff will provide more details as numbers are reported and substantiated.

HOUSE AGRICULTURE APPROPRIATIONS – On Thursday, May 4, the Agriculture, Rural Development, FDA, and Related Agencies Subcommittee (Chairman Skeen, R-N.M.) of the House Appropriations Committee marked up funding levels for agriculture agencies and programs for Fiscal Year 2001. Funding levels agreed upon by the Subcommittee are as follows:

Conservation Operations.....	\$676,812,000
Watershed Surveys and Planning.....	\$10,868,000
Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations.....	\$83,423,000
RC & D.....	\$41,015,000
Forestry Incentives Program (FIP).....	\$0
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).....	\$174,000,000

These funding levels will now go to the full House Appropriations Committee for consideration. NRCS Legislative Affairs staff will provide more details as numbers are reported and substantiated.

LAKE PONTCHARTRAIN BASIN RESTORATION ACT - The House approved, by a vote of 418 to 6, H.R. 2957. This legislation would amend the Federal Water Pollution Control Act to authorize funding to carry out certain water quality restoration projects for Lake Pontchartrain Basin, Louisiana, and for other purposes.

CARBON SEQUESTRATION – On Thursday, May 4, 2000 the Senate Subcommittee on Production and Price Competitiveness (Chairman Roberts, R-KS) of the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee held a hearing regarding carbon sequestration and issues related to global climate change. Chairman Roberts opened up the hearing by stressing the need to look closely at the issue. He said that he recognized there were many opportunities for farmers to have a role in carbon sequestration, and that more research and initiatives need to be undertaken in this area. He noted that the next Farm Bill needs to stress Best Management Practices for carbon sequestration. Senator Bob Kerrey (D-NE) said that he felt that we are doing a good job in stressing conservation on private lands, but that a big question mark remains on whether more needs to be done regarding climate change. USDA Chief Economist, Keith Collins testified that while significant gains in research have been made, more funding and activities are needed. Collins also testified that increasing funding and gearing programs like CRP and EQIP toward carbon sequestration could be a useful tool. NRCS research scientist, John Kimble, testified that there are many “wins” for everyone involved with carbon sequestration in agriculture. He also stressed the need for additional remote sensing technology in this area and cited many research projects and publications that he has led in this area. Former NRCS Chief, William Richards testified regarding the need to support conservation tillage, with respect to climate change issues.

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THIS WEEK:

TMDL FIELD HEARING – Senate Environment and Public Works Committee (Chairman Smith, R-N.H.) will hold a field hearing on the EPA’s proposed regulations on the daily maximum level of certain chemicals that can be discharged into waterways. The hearing is scheduled to take place at 1:00 p.m. in the White Mountain Regional High School, Whitefield, NH on May 6th.

EVERGLADES RESTORATION FULL COMMITTEE HEARING – The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee (Chairman Smith, R-N.H.) will hold a hearing on the administrations legislative proposal on the Comprehensive Everglades restoration Plan.

9:30 a.m., 406 Dirksen Senate Office Building, May 11th

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LOOKING AHEAD:

CONSERVATION AND REINVESTMENT ACT FULL COMMITTEE MARKUP –

The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee (Chairman Murkowski, R-AK) will mark up legislation that would allocate part of the royalties from offshore drilling to conservation activities. Currently all royalties go to the federal treasury. The Hearing will take place in 366 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building on June 14th at an undetermined time.

TMDL HEARING – The Department Operations, Oversight, Nutrition, and Forestry Subcommittee (Chairman Goodlatte, R-VA) of the House Agriculture Committee will hold a field hearing on the impact of the proposed total maximum daily load regulations on agriculture. The regulations would set maximum daily limits on the amount of certain discharges into waterways. This field hearing is scheduled to take place at 9:00 a.m. in the Wingate University Fine Arts Center, Wingate, N.C. on May 22nd.

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:

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
