

**WEEKLY LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:**

**September 25, 2000**

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**LAST WEEK:**

**FARMLAND PROTECTION** - The Senate Agriculture Subcommittee on Forestry, Conservation, and Rural Revitalization (Chairman Craig, R-ID) held a field hearing on farmland protection in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania on September 18. Witnesses included NRCS Associate Chief, Danny Sells, and State Conservationist (PA), Janet Oertly. Other witnesses included representatives from American Farmland Trust, and local and state farmland protection programs. Many of the local witnesses advocated that additional funding is the most critical need for the Farmland Protection Program.

Associate Chief Sells underscored the need for funding and the importance of farm policy that makes agriculture profitable as keys to preserving farmland. He also responded to questions from Sen. Rick Santorum (R-PA) and Chairman Craig. Their questions ranged from states establishing ranking criteria to the potential for block granting FPP funds to each state. The block grants were advocated by the American Farmland Trust in their testimony.

**URBAN RESOURCES PARTNERSHIP HEARING** – On Wednesday, September 20, the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Department Operations, Oversight, Nutrition and Forestry Subcommittee (Chairman Goodlatte, R-VA) held a hearing regarding the USDA Office of Inspector General (OIG) audit of the Urban Resources Partnership (URP). Witnesses for the hearing were Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, Jim Lyons and USDA Inspector General, Roger Viadero. Mr. Viadero discussed a recent audit of the initiative. He stated that a majority of the projects that his office reviewed did not meet the statutory authority permitted by USDA funds. He continued by exhibiting photographs of URP projects and raised questions regarding the management of the initiative. He also stated that the recommendations of the OIG have not been implemented by the Department. Under Secretary Lyons discussed the historical role of the Department in assisting communities. He explained that the initiative was needed to better connect non-farming residents with conservation and resource issues. He also stated that a relatively small amount of resources had been dedicated to the effort and that there is public support for the initiative. The

Subcommittee examined several statutory-related issues. The Chairman concluded the hearing by stating his concern and continued interest in the issue.

**NEW LEGISLATION -**

The following Bills of significance to NRCS and conservation have been introduced.

<b>BILL</b>	<b>MEMBER</b>	<b>PURPOSE</b>
H.R. 5130	Doolittle, CA	To authorize the Secretary of Interior to provide cost sharing for the CALFED water enhancement programs in California.
H.R. 5121	Shaw, FL	To authorize a comprehensive Everglades restoration plan.
H.R. 5054	Klink, PA	To amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to exclude from gross income gain on the sale or exchange of qualified conservation easements.

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**THIS WEEK:**

**AGRICULTURE RISK PROTECTION** – The House Agriculture Committee (Chairman Combest, R-TX) will hold a hearing to review the implementation of the Agriculture Risk Protection Act of 2000. (This hearing was originally scheduled for September 21.)

September 27                      10:00 a.m.                      1300 Longworth Building

**AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT-** Research, Nutrition, and General Legislation Subcommittee (Chairman Fitzgerald, IL) of the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee will hold a hearing on financial management at the Department of Agriculture.

September 27                      9:30 a.m.                      328A Russell Building

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