

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:**April 29, 2002**

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LAST WEEK
LEGISLATION OF NOTE

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

Bill	Sponsor	Purpose
H. R. 4479	Udall, CO	To authorize the Small Business Administration and the Department of Agriculture to assist farmers and ranchers seeking to develop and implement agricultural innovation plans in order to increase their profitability in ways that also provide environmental benefits.
S. 2138	Hutchinson, AR	To provide emergency agricultural assistance to producers during the 2002 crop year.

FARM BILL CONFERENCE WORK NEARS COMPLETION - The House and Senate Conference Committee held a press conference late Friday April 26 to announce an agreement on H.R. 2646, the Farm Bill. The legislation will be authorized for six years, beginning in FY 2002.

Members have been working on details of the agreement that will resolve all the differences in the two versions of the bill. There were some general agreements on existing and proposed USDA Conservation programs. Once the agreement is approved, the Conference Committee's staff will be charged with finalizing the language before it can be submitted to both the House and Senate for final approval.

Rep. Charles Stenholm (TX) in responding to a question regarding EQIP payment limitations stated " We recognize that there are new standards being applied to CAFO's...we set an overall limit that an individual might get... \$450,000 for a single individual, for the life of the six-year Farm Bill."

Sen. Harkin stated this was the largest increase in conservation programs ever, nearly 80% above current funding. Other Members stated the nature of the legislation to aid all regions by offering a variety of programs, including some new ones such as the Conservation Security Program (CSP).

Funding levels as reported by staff are as follows:

NOTE:(these figures are not final and may be adjusted once CBO scoring is completed)

Conservation Title

- CRP – 39.2 Million Acres
- EQIP – \$9 Billion over the life of the Farm Bill
- WRP – 1.35 million acres above current enrollment cap – to be distributed over life of Farm Bill
- Grassland Reserve – 2 million acres over the life of the Farm Bill
- WHIP – \$700 million over life of Farm Bill
- FPP- \$1 billion over life of Farm Bill (\$15 million subtracted for organic research)
- CSP – \$2 Billion over 10 years
- Watershed Rehabilitation - \$250 million over the life of the Farm Bill
- AMA \$30 million over the life of the Farm Bill

SENATE AGREEMENT ON ENERGY BILL/TAX REDUCTION LEGISLATION

– On Tuesday, Senate leaders reached an agreement on consideration of tax legislation. Both parties accepted a deadline of June 28 to conduct a vote on a permanent repeal of personal and estate taxes, which was passed by the House on April 18. The Senate agreement then cleared the way for consideration of H.R. 4, Energy Policy Reform. On Thursday, April 25, the Senate passed the measure by a vote of 88-11. The legislation, focused upon conservation and renewable fuels, differs significantly from the House-passed version of the legislation, and will require lengthy negotiation with the House. One provision of note contained in the Senate-passed bill, would triple the amount of ethanol added to gasoline over the next decade.

BUDGET/APPROPRIATIONS DISAGREEMENT – Last week, Members of the Congressional Budget and Appropriations Committees discussed differences of opinion regarding FY 2002 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations and allowances in the Budget. House Budget Committee Chairman, Jim Nussle, (IA) stated that that any supplemental passed this year should adhere to the \$27.1 billion requested by the administration. In response, House Appropriations Chairman Bill Young (FL) stated that his Committee would be assessing needs for emergency spending, but is not currently working from a particular overall funding number. The conflict in Congress is partly due to the absence of a finalized Budget Resolution. By law, the resolution should be enacted by April 15. The House passed its version of the Budget (H.Con.Res. 372) On March 20th. However, the Senate has been unable to reach consensus on a similar resolution.

PRESIDENT’S EARTH DAY MESSAGE – Speaking in Wilmington, New York on Monday, April 22, President Bush made a strong appeal for additional conservation program support as part of the Farm Bill. In his remarks, the President said,

“We also must encourage natural resource restoration, and one good place to start is in the farm bill, that’s right now before Congress. The stewardship is the daily work of America’s farmers, and those who own the land...If you have to make a living off your land, it’s important to make your land as productive as possible. Every day is Earth Day...And so, therefore, I support –strongly support a strong farm conservation effort in the farm bill before the Congress. With more funding and incentives for conservation, we can help our farmers preserve wetlands and wildlife habitat, and to better protect water quality.”

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THIS WEEK

HOMELAND SECURITY-Senate Appropriations Committee (Chairman Byrd, WV) will hold hearings on homeland security

April 30	TBA	216 Hart Bldg.
May 2 & 9	TBA	216 Hart Bldg.

TAX INCENTIVES FOR OPENSACE- The Select Revenue Measures Subcommittee (Chairman McCrery, LA) of the House Ways and Means Committee will hold a hearing on several proposals that would expand the tax incentives available to individuals and groups seeking to preserve openspace and promote conservation.

April 30	2:00 PM	1100 Longworth Bldg.
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WATER PROJECTS FOR THE RIO GRANDE RIVER VALLEY FIELD HEARING – The Water and Power Subcommittee (Chairman Calvert, CA) of the House Resources Committee will hold a field hearing on legislation that would authorize additional water projects in the lower Rio Grande River Valley. The hearing will be held at the University of Texas at Brownsville, in the Science, Engineering and Technology Building Lecture Hall, 80 Fort Brown , Brownsville, Texas. This hearing will be held after the Lower Rio Grande River Water Security Field Hearing that is scheduled to begin at 10:00 a.m. at the same location.

May 3	Time TBA	Brownsville, TX
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