

**LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:****April 2, 2001**

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**LAST WEEK**

**SENATE BIOMASS AND ENVIRONMENTAL TRADING HEARING** -The Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee (Chairman Richard Lugar-IN) held a hearing on March 28, 2001 to listen to experts regarding the use of biomass and the development of environmental trading by farmers. The three panels of witnesses covered a broad range of issues.

The first panel discussed biomass from farms and forests. Dr. Patrick Gruber of Cargill/DOW discussed a new manufacturing facility in Nebraska that will use up to 14 million bushels of corn annually to convert corn into plastics. Ed Woolsey, Iowa Sustainable Energy, described the Charitan Valley biomass pilot that is using switchgrass from 50,000 acres as fuel to generate electricity.

There were many questions from Senators about the role of the federal government in biomass programs. Sen. Ben Nelson (NE) asked, "what is the single most important factor toward boosting the future of biomass efforts?" All panelists agreed that promoting sustainable farming practices that maximize vegetative cover would have the greatest benefits. Chairman Lugar asked about the potential for biomass efforts to replace imported liquid fuels. Dr. Bruce Dale, Michigan State University indicated that all U.S. domestic needs could be replaced in 20 years with biomass fuels. Sen. Michael Crapo (ID) asked if animal waste should be considered as biomass. All panelists agreed that animal waste should be considered as biomass in legislation.

The other panels described environmental trading. They discussed the potential for trading carbon, offering various policy options for farmers including direct payments. Panelists indicated that USDA should lead the carbon-trading efforts by supporting large-scale pilot projects to facilitate the development of a market for carbon trading. John Kadyszewski, Winrock International, described specific methods used by experts for measuring carbon. David Batchelor, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality described a new Michigan program that is going to trade water quality credits. He emphasized the critical role of NRCS by providing technical assistance to farmers to plan and implement conservation practices that meet the high quality performance standards for the program. He emphasized the need to support NRCS in order to provide this technical assistance as the program grows.

**VIRGINIA MOURNS 4<sup>th</sup> DISTRICT REPRESENTATIVE** - Rep. Norman Sisisky, 73, who had represented the Virginia 4th District since 1983, died March 29 at his home in Petersburg. The 4th District, which includes much of the Tidewater region as well as flat agricultural land south of the James River, is home to peanuts and hog farms and to some of the nation's largest military populations. Rep. Sisisky, a popular figure, championed national defense and many domestic issues. He was a senior member of the Armed Services Committee Military Procurement Subcommittee and was a member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. The passing of Rep. Sisisky leaves three vacancies in the House of Representatives, including those from the death of Rep. Julian Dixon (D-CA), and the retirement of Rep. Bud Shuster (R-PA).

**FARM BILL FIELD HEARING** - On March 24, 2001 the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee (Acting Chairman Tom Harkin, IA) held field hearings in Lewis, Iowa and Spencer, Iowa on the future farm bill and agricultural and rural issues. In the hearings the Iowa Pork Producers asked for increases in conservation programs for livestock. Farmers testifying supported the idea of paying farmers for using conservation practices on their land. Others testified about low farm prices and the large percentage of net farm income provided by government payments. Shirley Fredrickson, RC&D Coordinator with the Golden Hills RC&D in Oakland, Iowa, was among those providing remarks. She discussed several local projects in Southwestern Iowa.

**CONNECTICUT DELEGATION BRIEFING** - On March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2001, Rep. Nancy Johnson (CT), hosted a briefing on conservation issues and the CT Farmer Research Partnership, an initiative that utilizes groups of farmers to assist agricultural researchers at the Univ. of Connecticut. Partnership representatives discussed a range of issues important to farmers, emphasizing farmland protection, animal agriculture, water quality, and other challenges facing farmers in a rapidly developing state. Rep. Rosa DeLauro and Rep. Rob Simmons attended the briefing along with staff of the House Agriculture Committee and other Connecticut member offices. Panelists at the forum included Walter Smith, Water Quality Coordinator with NRCS in Connecticut.

### LEGISLATION OF NOTE

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

<b>BILL</b>	<b>MEMBER</b>	<b>PURPOSE</b>
H.R. 1138	Rep. Smith and Rep. Emerson	To amend the Clean Water Act to exempt animal feeding operations from permits if the state has a nutrient management program.
H.R. 1145	Rep. English, Rep. Sherwood, Rep. Hart, and Rep. Kucinich	To amend the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 to assure that the amount deposited in the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund is spent without an annual appropriation or fiscal year limitation.
H.R. 1321	Rep. Thune, Rep. Hinchey, Rep. Kaptur, Rep. Cooksey, Rep. Wynn, and Rep. Boswell	To amend the conservation provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985 to establish a voluntary, incentive-based conservation security program
S. 606	Sen. Crapo	To provide authority to an Ombudsman within EPA to oversee actions of agency and respond to citizen complaints about the agency.

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### THIS WEEK

**COMMODITY PROGRAMS**-The House Agriculture Committee (Chairman Combest, TX) will hold hearings on the Sorghum and Dairy Industries.

April 4	10:00 a.m.	1300 Longworth
April 5	9:30 a.m.	1300 Longworth

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