

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:**April 30, 2001**

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LAST WEEK

BUDGET CONFERENCE HELD - The House and Senate held a Conference to resolve differences in House Resolution 83, the FY 2002 budget outline. Conferees discussed the need to reach consensus, although no votes were taken. Sen. Grassley (IA) stated the need for more funding for agriculture and conservation as indicated in the Senate passed amendments. The conference ended with no schedule set to present the final bill. The budget resolution is non-binding that sets funding levels for several Committees, primarily appropriations.

SENATE AND HOUSE HEARINGS ON FY 2002 AGRICULTURE

APPROPRIATIONS – The Senate and House held hearings on FY 2002 Agriculture Appropriations. Secretary of Agriculture, Ann M. Veneman, presented testimony and responded to questions in both hearings.

The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture (Chairman Cochran-MS) hearing was held on April 25, 2001. Sen. Richard Durbin (IL) questioned the elimination of WRP, WHIP, EQIP and CRP in the President's budget. USDA Budget Officer, Steve Dewhurst pointed out that WRP would reach the authorized 1,075,000 acres limit this year and that FPP and WHIP had already reached authorized funding limits. The Secretary noted eminent reauthorization of the farm bill and said that conservation would be an important part of the legislation.

The House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture (Chairman Bonilla-TX) held a hearing on April 26. Rep. Jack Kingston (GA) stated an interest in how well conservation programs such as CRP, WRP, WHIP, EQIP are working. He requested an update in writing be provided.

HOUSE BRIEFING ON GULF OF MEXICO HYPOXIA- On Monday, April 23, a briefing was held for House and Senate staff regarding the impact of nitrogen on hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico. The meeting was sponsored by the Upper Mississippi River Congressional Task Force. The Mississippi River / Gulf of Mexico Nutrient Task Force presented the results of the integrated assessment and proposed Action Plan. The Action Plan outlines a goal to reduce nitrogen discharges into the Gulf by 30% by 2015. Among the key indicators used to monitor progress includes producers/acres enrolled in WRP and CRP, projects funded through EQIP, vegetated buffers along rivers and streams in

priority watersheds, and acres in conservation tillage. Many key staff from House and Senate offices as well as Committee staff attended the meeting.

LEGISLATION OF NOTE

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

BILL	MEMBER	PURPOSE
H. R. 1462	Hefley, CO	To establish an Interior Department program to assist weed management entities to control non-native weeds on public and private land.
H. R. 1474	Jones, NC	To amend the Federal Water Pollution Control Act relating to wetlands mitigation banking and for other purposes.
H. R. 1506	Pickering, MS	To authorize an annual enrollment of land in the wetlands reserve program at 250,000 acres and to extend the program through 2005.
S.758	Hutchinson, AR	To authorize an annual enrollment of land in the wetlands reserve program at 250,000 acres and to extend the program through 2005.

THIS WEEK

HOUSE BRIEFING ON NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT- The Upper Mississippi River Congressional Task Force is hosting a briefing for Senate and House staff. Tom Christensen, NRCS Director-Animal Husbandry and Clean Water Programs, will be presenting information on nutrient management in the Mississippi River basin.

April 30

2:00 p.m.

HC-6 Capitol

MIDWEST LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP - On Monday, April 30, 2001, the NRCS Legislative Affairs Staff will conduct a workshop on the legislative process and emerging issues for NRCS and employees participating in the Leadership Development Program. Speakers will include Mr. Jeffrey Zinn of the Congressional Research Service, Ms. Lynh Nguyen from the office of Sen. Richard Durbin (IL) and Mr. Allen Hance with the Northeast-Midwest Institute. The Midwest leadership development program is an opportunity for agency field staff to enhance skills, knowledge, and understanding of NRCS National Headquarters roles and functions.

ENERGY AND AGRICULTURE- The Conservation, Credit, Rural Development, and Research Subcommittee (Chairman Lucas, OK) of the House Agriculture Committee will hold oversight hearings on how energy supply and demand affect agriculture.

May 2

2:00 p.m.

1300 Longworth

FEDERAL FARM COMMODITY PROGRAMS-The House Agriculture Committee, (Chairman Combest, TX), will hold hearings on federal farm commodity programs. On May 2, the fruit, vegetable and honey industries will testify and on May 3 the National Farmers Organization will testify.

May 2	10:00 a.m.	1300 Longworth
May 3	9:30 a.m.	1300 Longworth

LOOKING AHEAD

AGRICULTURE FREE TRADE PROPOSALS-The House Agriculture Committee (Chairman Combest-TX) will hold an oversight hearing on agriculture trade in the western hemisphere, including a review of the planned Free Trade Association of the Americas and Administration proposals on trade. The witnesses are Secretary of Agriculture, Ann M. Veneman and Robert B. Zoellick, U.S. Trade Representative.

May 23	10:00 a.m.	1300 Longworth
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