

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:**June 11, 2001**

NRCS, Office of Legislative Affairs
 Room 5121, South Agriculture Bldg.
 (202) 720-2771

For additional information contact:

Douglas J. McKalip
 Eric W. Carlson
 Sharyn C. Alvarez

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LAST WEEK

FISCAL 2002 AGRICULTURE APPROPRIATIONS - Subcommittee Markup -On June 6, the Agriculture, Rural Development and FDA and Related Agencies Subcommittee (Chairman Bonilla, TX) of the House Appropriations Committee marked up fiscal 2002 appropriations for programs under its jurisdiction. Conservation Operations budget was increased by \$70 million over last year. Full committee markup is scheduled next week when more details should be made available.

CALIFORNIA'S 32nd DISTRICT ELECTS A NEW REPRESENTATIVE - On Tuesday June 5, Diane E. Watson won a house seat and was sworn in on Thursday as California's representative for the 32nd District. Ms. Watson secedes Julian Dixon who passed away December 2000. Ms. Watson has served 20 years in the State Senate and most recently as ambassador to Micronesia, a group of 607 islands in the Pacific Ocean.

AGRICULTURE CONSERVATION PROGRAMS - On June 6, 2001 the Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Rural Development and Research (Chairman Lucas, OK) held the second in a series of three hearings to discuss conservation programs. Chairman Lucas specifically requested the witnesses to make recommendations regarding current conservation programs, and whether new programs are needed to help producers comply with regulatory standards in light of a comprehensive farm bill.

Two panels of witnesses appeared before the committee. The first panel consisted of representatives of NACD, National Council RC&D Association, National Grains and Feed Association, and National Association of State Department of Agriculture. The second panel included representatives of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Sportsman Coalition, Soil and Water Conservation Society, and Coalition of Environmental and Conservation groups.

Both panels requested increases in several conservation programs, including the Conservation Reserve (CRP), Wetland Reserve (WRP), Wildlife Habitat Incentives (WHIP), the Farmland Protection (FPP), Environmental Quality Incentives (EQIP) and the creation of a grassland reserve. However, not all witnesses agreed that expansion of programs was a main priority. Some of the changes that were recommended were to increase CRP to 45 million acres, make WRP an annual program with a limit of 250,000 acres annually, increase funding for FPP to \$65- \$100 million, increase EQIP to \$300 million-\$1 billion, and permanent authorization of RC&D.

All the panelists expressed the need to increase NRCS staff to provide technical assistance.

Witnesses faced questions addressing how the existing and proposed new programs such as the block grants to states should be structured to best deal with the many regulations facing landowners, especially livestock producers, assure accountability, and maintain equality to all farmers. Many members questioned the proposal to eliminate the cap for EQIP that would favor larger operations rather than small and disadvantaged farmers.

Chairman Lucas and Rep. Putnam (FL) questioned both panels of witnesses about the use of outside vendors. The first panel was encouraging the role of NRCS to establish guidelines and to certify third-party vendors, while the second panel described the successful use of third-party vendors to help with program outreach in WRP, CRP, CREP, and FPP.

A proposal to fund a \$3 billion Conservation Incentives effort to pay farmers and ranchers for stewardship received many questions. The witnesses stressed that if the Committee was unable to find a minimum of \$3 billion for the new program that available funding should be used to increase existing conservation programs.

The proposal to fund block grants to states in addition to increases in conservation programs was questioned by both members and other witnesses. Chairman Lucas expressed concerns about the accountability of funding. Other members were supportive but questioned witnesses if simply improving existing program delivery would be more effective.

AGRICULTURE CONSERVATION PROGRAMS- FIELD HEARING - On June 9, 2001 Conservation, Credit, Rural Development and Research Subcommittee (Chairman Lucas, OK) of the House Agriculture Committee held a field hearing in Weatherford, OK on agricultural conservation programs.

VENEMAN SWEARS IN SUB CABINET MEMBERS - Secretary Veneman announced that four members of her subcabinet, who were confirmed by the U.S. Senate last week, have been officially sworn into office. Secretary Veneman administered the of office to J.B. Penn as Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services; Lou Gallegos, Assistant Secretary for Administration and Mary Waters, as Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations; William T. Hawks, Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs, was sworn in on May 24. Eric Bost, Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services was confirmed last week, however, he will be sworn in next month.

LOOKING AHEAD

RURAL DEVELOPMENT - OVERSIGHT HEARING - The Conservation, Credit, Rural Development and Research Subcommittee (Chairman Lucas, OK) of the House Agriculture Committee will hold an oversight hearing on rural development programs.

June 26 1:00 p.m. 1300 Longworth

FEDERAL FARM POLICY - FIELD HEARING - General Farm Commodities and Risk Management Subcommittee (Chairman Chambliss, GA) of the House Agriculture Committee will hold field hearings on federal farm policy.

June 18 3:00 p.m. Fresno, CA
June 23 9:00 a.m. Macon, GA

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