

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:**March 13, 2000**

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LAST WEEK:

FARM POLICY HEARING IN LUBBOCK, TEXAS - On Wednesday, March 6, the first of ten nationwide field hearings convened in the southern Great Plains region for producer assessments of the nation's current farm policy. Testimony from 19 producers of cotton, corn, soybeans, wheat, rice peanuts, cattle and sheep praised the flexibility of the current farm policy of the "Freedom to Farm" their choice of crops for commodity programs, while voicing their agreement with Committee Chairman Larry Combest, R-TX, that those market freedoms also require the government to fulfill its responsibilities to international trade opening agreements, less costly regulations, and recognition of the tax burdens placed upon producers. Mr. Combest said that producers expressed a clear desire to find improvements in farm policy, but no desire to abandon the current policy. He said "Over the next several months of hearings around the country Agriculture Committee members will take in what producers say is needed in farm policy, in the search for a consensus." Charlie Stenholm, D-TX, the Committee's Ranking Minority Member, commended Chairman Combest for bringing this process to the people by hearing directly from producers on their views of the current farm program.

WATER QUALITY BILLS SUBCOMMITTEE MARKUP - The Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee (Chairman Boehlert, R-NY) of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee approved two bills that would provide federal dollars for clean water projects after changing the funding levels. Substitute amendments were offered by Mr. Boehlert and approved by voice vote. H.R. 2328 would reauthorize the Clean Lakes Program created under the Water Pollution Control Act of 1972. The original version would have funded the program at \$100 million a year for fiscal 2000 through 2005. The bill also called for authorizing \$15 million for a study of acid rain impact on lakes. However, Boehlert's substitute reduced the program funding to \$50 million per year and raised the funding for the acid rain study to \$25 million. The program provides federal financial and technical assistance to states for improving the water quality of public lakes. H.R. 910 would establish a fund to restore the San Gabriel groundwater basin in Southern California. The original version would have authorized \$15 million annually for fiscal 2000 through 2004. Under Boehlert's substitute amendment, the program's scope was expanded and an additional \$10 million for each year. The Army Corps of Engineers would administer the fund in cooperation with local water authorities. The substitute version for H.R. 910 would also expand the

scope of a study of groundwater contamination caused by perchlorates. Perchlorates are chemicals used in rocket fuel that have been found in drinking water supplies. The original version would have focused on several California counties, including Los Angeles, San Bernardino and Sacramento. Boehlert's substitute added several bodies of water in Texas in the perchlorate study. The bill would authorize \$25 million for the perchlorate studies.

HOUSE MARKUP OF SUPPLEMENTAL SPENDING BILL - The House Appropriations Committee (Chairman C.W. "Bill" Young, R-Fla.) debated and approved a \$9 billion spending bill for defense, disaster relief and aid to the Colombian government by a 33-13 vote. The bipartisan vote followed the defeat or withdrawal of all major amendments proposed during the markup. The approved legislation does include an additional \$35 million to assist in implementation of CRP and the Wetlands Reserve Program. The funding would make up for shortfalls caused by the Section 11 cap on Commodity Credit Corporation transfers. The committee also added some provisions earmarked for victims of last year's hurricanes. Committee aides said they expect floor action on the bill next Thursday. The Senate Appropriations Committee plans to mark up its version of the supplemental during the week of March 20.

NGA SUPPORT FOR DAM REHABILITATION LEGISLATION - The National Governors Association (NGA) has recently announced its support of federal legislation that would authorize NRCS to support state and local sponsors on rehabilitation of NRCS watershed dams. In a recently adopted resolution, the NGA stated the need to address aging watershed structures. The organization listed the potential needs to include extending dam life, addressing component deterioration, repairing damage from catastrophic rainfall events, improving fish and wildlife habitat, dam removal, and upgrading dams to meet state dam safety laws. The NGA policy will be in place from the NGA Winter Meeting 2000 through the NGA Winter Meeting 2002. Currently Congress is reconsidering two related pieces of legislation, H.R. 728 and S. 1762.

LEGISLATION OF NOTE –

The following bill of significance to NRCS and conservation has been introduced:

BILL	MEMBER	PURPOSE
H.R. 3847	Bereuter, (NE)	Would amend the Agricultural Market Transaction Act to authorize a program to encourage agricultural producers to rest and rehabilitate croplands while enhancing soil and water conservation and wildlife habitat.

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THIS WEEK:

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY HEARING - The Agriculture, Rural Development, FDA and Related Agencies Subcommittee (Chairman Skeen, R-NM) of the House Appropriations Committee will hold a hearing on the Department of Agriculture's information technology activities. A particular interest of the Committee will be the Service Center Modernization Initiative (SCMI). The witnesses for the hearing will be Joe Leo, Chief Information Officer and Pearlie Reed, Chief, Natural Resources Conservation Service. Mr. Reed is also Chairman of the National Food and Agriculture Council.

Mar. 16

10:00 a.m.

2362A Rayburn Bldg.

LOOKING AHEAD:

FARM POLICY FIELD HEARINGS – House Agriculture Committee Chairman, Larry Combest (R-TX) and Ranking Member Charlie Stenholm (D-TX) have announced the schedule of farm policy hearings in 10 cities in regions from March through May, encouraging producers to submit detailed proposals for agriculture policy. Although each hearing may last for up to four hours, full discussion of producers' plans and Committee Members' questions will limit the number of witnesses who can testify at the hearings. Producers may be invited to offer testimony as a witness, or if not selected, producers may either submit specific views for the record, or e-mail informal comments to the Committee. To be considered as a potential witness at the hearing, producers should include information about their agricultural experience and their farming operations. The Committee will select witnesses who are qualified to provide specific testimony about federal farm policy, and answer questions posed by Agriculture Committee Members about policy alternatives.

The schedule for the Farm Policy Field Hearings are as follows:

Friday, March 17**Memphis, Tennessee**

Agricenter International
10:00 a.m. Central Time

Saturday, March 18**Auburn, Alabama**

Auburn Univ. Hotel &
Conference Center
10:00 a.m. Central Time

Monday, March 27**Raleigh, North Carolina**

North Carolina State Univ.
McKimmon Center Area 1
9:00 a.m. Eastern Time

Saturday, April 1**West Chester, Ohio**

Lakota East High School
10:00 a.m. Eastern Time

Monday, April 3**Kutztown, Pennsylvania**

Kutztown University
9:00 a.m. Eastern Time

Monday, May 1
Sacramento, California
Heidrick Ag History Center
(Woodland, California)
8:30 a.m. Pacific Time

Tuesday, May 2
Sioux Falls, South Dakota
Augustana College
8:30 a.m. Central Time

Friday, May 12
Boise, Idaho
City Council Building
10:00 a.m. Mountain Time

Saturday, May 13
Peoria, Illinois
Peoria Civic Center
8:30 a.m. Central Time

Those who are interested in testifying at the field hearings in March for Lubbock, Memphis or Auburn, must send a letter addressed to the Chief Clerk, c/o House Committee on Agriculture at 1301 Longworth Building, Washington, D.C., 20515. If contacted to testify for the hearing, producers are required under the Rules of the House of Representatives to file an affidavit disclosing the amount and source of each federal contract or grant they receive (disclosure of farm payments or USDA loans is not required). A brief biography of the witness must also be included. Also, those witnesses will need to provide 100 copies of their testimony in advance. Producers who are unable to testify at a field hearing may instead submit written testimony for the official record by May 20, 2000, but must include their name, address, phone number and 10 copies of their testimony in their letter to the Agriculture Committee's Chief Clerk.

AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT ONLINE SYSTEM MARKUP - The Department Operations, Oversight, Nutrition and Forestry Subcommittee (Chairman Goodlatte, R-VA) of the House Agriculture Committee will mark up legislation, H.R. 852, that would require the Agriculture Department to establish an electronic filing and retrieval system to enable the public to file all required paperwork electronically and to make all information and reports available on line to the public.

Mar. 23 10:00 a.m. 1300 Longworth Bldg.

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