

**LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:****March 20, 2000**

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**LAST WEEK:**

**INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY HEARING** – On Thursday, March 16, the Agriculture, Rural Development, FDA and Related Agencies Subcommittee (Chairman Skeen, R-M) of the House Appropriations Committee held a hearing on the Department of Agriculture's information technology activities. Joe Leo, Chief Information Officer, was the primary witness with Pearlie S. Reed, Chief, Natural Resources Conservation Service present for any questions the Committee members might have. Mr. Leo testified that the Year 2000 challenge was successfully met but pointed out some specific problems that must be overcome at USDA. Some of those problems were providing effective leadership and oversight to the Department's Service Center Modernization Initiative; enhancing the security of our financial and information assets and protecting the privacy of our customers; promoting the development of automation and information technology tools at USDA; improving the management of the Department's telecommunications resources; and strengthening capital planning and investment control process for all the Department's information technology resources. He also said the Department's overall budget request for information technology in FY 2001 totals nearly \$1.3 billion in budget authority and was similar to the \$1.2 billion in budget authority for FY 2000. He went on to say that the money would fund staff, hardware/software purchases and support, contractor services, and telecommunications and other infrastructure expenditures, as well as funds distributed to states.

Mr. Leo further stated that within the \$1.3 billion, OCIO's specific budget requests increased funding for three key initiatives: \$75 million for the Service Center Initiative to continue installing the Common Computing Environment, an integrated shared information technology infrastructure in the county based agencies; \$6.6 million to strengthen the Department's capacity to secure its data and financial assets and protect the privacy of its customers; and \$2 million to develop and implement a common, corporate wide and more efficient approach to issues that all agencies must address before electronic-government can be fully implemented.

Mr. Leo commented that the Service Center Modernization Initiative (SCMI) includes the program services of the Farm Service Agency (FSA), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Rural Development (RD) Mission Area. He said that the county-based agencies will provide an estimated \$55 billion in farm,



**TOTAL MAXIMUM DAILY LOAD HEARING** – The Fisheries, Wildlife and Water Subcommittee (Chairman Crapo, R-ID) of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee will hold a hearing on the impact of the regulated community of proposals by the Environmental Protection Agency to make some changes in rules regarding Total Maximum Daily Load and National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit programs established by the Clean Water Act. The programs set a total maximum daily load for the level of pollutants that can be discharged into a body of water while still meeting water quality standards.

Mar. 23

10:00 a.m.

406 Dirksen Bldg.

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**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:

**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

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