

**LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR:****March 6, 2000**

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**LAST WEEK:**

**NRCS HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS HEARING** - The Natural Resources Conservation Service appeared before the House of Representatives for the Fiscal Year 2001 Appropriation Hearings on March 2, 2000. Undersecretary Jim Lyons, Chief Pearlie Reed, and Department Budget Officer Steve Dewhurst presented testimony. Representative Joe Skeen (R-NM) presided over the hearing, and all Subcommittee members were present except Mr. Walsh, Mr. Dickey, Mr. Kingston, and Ms. DeLauro. The Members were supportive of NRCS program activities. However, they questioned the size of some of the NRCS FY 2001 budget proposals. Also questioned was the need for the Congress to pass authorizing legislation for most of the \$1.3 billion farm conservation activities proposed in the USDA Farm Safety Net Initiative before these funds could be appropriated.

Mr. Lyons defended and explained Administration policy position on regulatory activities, such as, total maximum daily load and Forest Service activities. The Members were concerned that farmers, ranchers, and small communities were being negatively impacted by an increasing number of actions that would put them in difficult financial straits, and USDA should better defend Agriculture's interest instead of helping EPA develop regulations.

Other concerns expressed included proposals for new programs when there are insufficient NRCS resources to provide current farmer and rancher technical assistance needs, having sufficient technical assistance funding to continue the FY 2000 Conservation Reserve Program, ongoing NRCS Urban Resources Partnership activities, and the Small Watershed Program construction backlog.

In response to a question about FY 2000 CRP activities, Chief Reed testified that these activities would cease on or about July 30, 2000, because the funds available for technical assistance would be spent by then. The Department went on record that the problem with technical assistance for the CRP and other 1996 Farm Bill programs was due to a cap placed by the Farm Bill on Commodity Credit Corporation Section 11 transfers. The Department and OMB are working together to decide how to proceed with the FY 2000 technical assistance limitation, and the Farm Safety Net proposed legislation would resolve the problem when it is transmitted to the Congress and passed into law.

**SENATE CROP INSUANCE AND NRCS WATERSHED PROJECT MARKUP-**

On Thursday, March 2, 2000, the Senate Committee on Agriculture Nutrition and Forestry marked up legislation dealing with crop insurance policy. The Committee considered language forwarded by Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA), which would make crop insurance participation contingent upon the implementation of conservation plans. The amendment was approved by the Committee. The Committee also considered a resolution approving the Bexar Medina Atascosa watershed project in south Texas. The project would improve irrigation efficiency and conserve water in the Edwards Aquifer. The project was approved by the Committee and is now an authorized P.L. 566 project.

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**THIS WEEK:**

**WATER CONTROL PROJECTS** - The Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee (Chairman Boehlert, R-NY) of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee will hold a hearing on proposed Army Corps of Engineers waterway improvements and flood control projects.

Mar. 8

9:30 a.m.

2167 Rayburn 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 6**  
**Lubbock, Texas**  
 Civic Center  
 9:00 a.m. Central Time

**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.

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