



November 2019

HAPPENINGS ON THE HILL by Glenn Luedke

BUDGET

The House/Senate passed a stopgap spending bill and the President signed the bill immediately. An amendment that would have enacted an across-the board one percent spending cut was voted down.

POLLINATORS

A bi-partisan bill (Monarch & Pollinator Highway (MPH) Act of 2019) that would revive monarch and pollinator habitat has been introduced. The bill, if passed, would offer assistance to states and create pollinator friendly habitats along roads and highways. The project would be funded by a federal grant program and requires the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) to assist the states in developing the most beneficial practices that could be applied along roadways and highways. The DOT would prioritize which best practices are to be used and develop and provide technical information and assistance when requested by states. Priorities outlined include mowing strategies and vegetation management approaches to address weed and pest issues.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

The US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) has issued several final rules to include Blanket Protection (eliminates the automatic application of prohibited activities such as when a species is listed as "threatened"). The law gives the USFWS and National Marine Fisheries (NMFS) the authority to extend the rules when a species is listed as "threatened". Another rule passed by the two Federal Agencies tightens up the guidelines regarding "future predictions" and how far in advance a species can be listed based on "foreseeable future impacts". The intent of this rule is, in part, an attempt to rein in reliance on climate change predictions.

LABOR

A bi-partisan supported bill was introduced in the House. The bill received strong support from numerous farm organizations, but it is anticipated it will have little or no support from the White House. The interest in farm labor is steadily increasing as a third state (Washington with

100,000 ag laborers) is about to require overtime pay for farm workers. The Farm Workforce Modernization Act (H.R. 5038) would address the critical ag labor crisis by providing an adjustment in status for current experienced farm workers without proper documentation and would "modernize" the current H-2A guest worker program for agricultural workers. The bill would only apply to migrant workers who entered the U.S. legally. The House Judiciary Committee passed the bill.

FDA

The new FDA Administrator, Steve Hahn, was approved during confirmation hearings. Hahn expressed that one of his top issues is "food policy and labeling". Hahn stated he is interested in "clear, transparent and understandable labeling for the American people".

USDA

Agriculture Secretary Perdue recently held several meetings that addressed several front burner topics.

Hemp Production: Secretary Perdue announced that in late October the USDA has established the U.S. Domestic Hemp Production Program. This program was a part of the 2018 Farm Bill and creates a consistent regulatory framework around hemp production throughout the United States. The plan will be published in the Federal Register and the public is invited to comment. USDA has developed guidelines for sampling and testing procedures. Once all plans are in place, hemp production will be eligible for some USDA programs, including insurance coverage through Whole-Farm Revenue Protection. It is predicted the hemp industry will have a producer-funded check off program. Growers have shown interest in paying fees to promote hemp. There is a lot of discussion regarding production of this crop, and there remains a certain amount of regulatory uncertainty. Researchers have expressed concern over the 15 day window for growers to test their hemp crops before harvesting.

Ag Economy: In a meeting with ag lenders, Perdue stated the ag economy remains fairly sound but producers and those who serve the producer are having to dip into working capital as well as rely more on operating loans. Perdue stated the farm bankruptcy rate remains below the 1980's level. Land is being sold, but mostly to other growers. Net farm income has dropped almost 50% over the last five years. However, the decline came after sector income hit all-time highs in 2013. Farm debt has reached its highest level since the 1980's. A recent banker survey indicates farm income and expenditures are declining. Quality farmland values have declined. However, ranch land values have increased. The banker survey indicates ag lenders predict that 70% of producers with operating lines of credit will have repayment problems. Ag lenders stated repayment is being spread over more years. Ag lenders are cautioning those in the agri-business sector to be prepared and have a plan for how it will affect them. Five percent of all farms are predicted to have produced 75% of total sales.

Organics: USDA has published a final rule in the Federal Register to amend the National List of Allowed and Prohibited Substances based on public input and the April 2018 recommendations from the National Organic Standards Board. The final rule allows elemental sulfur to be used as a slug or snail bait to reduce crop losses. It also allows polyoxin D zinc salt for plant disease control and reclassifies magnesium chloride from a synthetic to a non-synthetic substance. The final rule was effective November 22, 2019.

EPA

EPA plans to rescind rules regarding safety updates the federal government imposed on chemical storage sites after a fertilizer warehouse explosion occurred in 2013. The changes will

keep several safety measures in place but will remove mandates for expanded public access to details at chemical storage sites.

Worker Protection Standards: The EPA is proposing updates to the Worker Protection Standard pesticide regulation regarding Application Exclusion Zone requirements. The changes should make the requirements more effective and easier to implement according to EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler, who stated they listened to input from stakeholders. The changes modify the rule so it is applicable and enforceable only on a farm owner's property, exempt immediate family members of farm owners from all aspects of the requirements, adds clarifying language that pesticide applications that are suspended due to individuals entering a zone may be resumed after those individuals have left the zone and simplifies the criteria for deciding whether pesticide applications are subject to 25 or 100 foot zone.

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2020 NAICC ANNUAL MEETING AND AG PRO EXPO [Click HERE](#) to register.

SWOT by Matt Eich, NAICC President

At the November 2019 Fall Board Meeting, the NAICC Executive Board completed a SWOT assessment that could be considered a “mini” strategic planning session. A SWOT assessment is analyzing the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats that our organization faces right now. It also helps us confront the realities of how agriculture and our businesses are changing. The SWOT process shows us if NAICC is ready for the future and helps us decide in which direction we should go.

In the next four issues of *NAICC Shorts*, we will take a look at what was discovered. If you have any suggestions or additions, feel free to contact President Matt Eich or EVP Allison Jones with your thoughts and ideas.

Here is a one point for each of the categories that the Executive Board identified:

Strength: Our foremost strength is our annual meeting

Weakness: Although we have a strong membership, we see a segment of members who come and go to the annual meetings yet remain uninvolved in the other areas of NAICC life.

Opportunity: The opportunity of creating a stronger social media presence that could strengthen our members and non-members knowledge of the goings-on of the NAICC.

Threat: The current down turn in the ag economy, and how that will affect membership in the future.

After going through the SWOT process, I feel NAICC is on the right track for what the future of our organization has in store. It was a positive experience, and this board and the future boards representing NAICC have a solid foundation from which to lead and serve its

members. NAICC has many forward thinking and passionate members that will continue to build NAICC into an even stronger organization and a legacy that we all can be proud of.



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Have a *Hot!* Topic?

If you have any hot topics that you would like to appear in the newsletter or a News Short, please email to Lisa at lwheelock@greatlakesag.com. What is important to one NAICC member is important to the organization!

NAICC

Your professional society representing the nation's crop production, research consultants and quality assurance professionals.

National Alliance of Independent Crop Consultants; 100 Pineberry Drive, Vonore, TN 37885
Phone: 901-861-0511; Email: MemberServices@naicc.org

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