

U.S. Senator battles ag weather forecasting elimination

WASHINGTON, D.C. — U.S. Senator Howell Heflin (D-Ala) has led successful battles in the Senate to save a key agricultural weather forecasting service from being eliminated and to prevent the Federal Trade Commission from interfering with agricultural cooperatives.

In Senate Committee action,

Heflin successfully fought an Administration proposal to kill the federal government's only agricultural weather forecasting program—an essential service that saves American farmers hundreds of millions of dollars each year.

Heflin, also a member of the

Senate Agriculture Committee, restored the \$1.2 million budget for the National Weather Service Agricultural Program.

"This farm weather forecasting service saves American farmers more than \$750 million each year in production costs of the major agricultural commodities of

cotton, corn, soybeans, livestock, wheat and rice," Heflin said.

"The \$1.2 million price tag for this vital agricultural weather forecasting program is money wisely invested in helping farmers with their planting, fertilizing, and harvesting and in insuring an abundant and affordable supply of food and fiber for the American people," he said.

Heflin said he has been told by numerous Alabama farmers that the state's multi-billion dollar agricultural economy is dependent upon the weather reporting service.

"Weather information is especially vital to farmers," Heflin said. "This program provides accurate weather forecasts that keep costs down while increasing farm productivity. This valuable information helps the farmer decide when to irrigate, fertilize, plant, control pests and weeds, and even when to harvest his crops."

Heflin pointed out that the nation's first Agricultural Weather Service was established at Auburn University in 1973. The program is administered by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Ad-

ministration.

In Alabama alone, Heflin said, there are 10 NOAA weather radio stations and 76 commercial radio and television stations, newspapers, and cable television systems that subscribe to the agricultural "weather wire."

In other committee action, Heflin led the fight to prevent the Federal Trade Commission from gaining jurisdiction over agricultural cooperatives and farmers' associations.

"American farmers are having a tough enough time making ends meet now without having to deal with yet another layer of bureaucrats in Washington, D.C. meddling in their affairs," Heflin said.

"The U.S. Department of Agriculture was created in 1862 to deal with the problems confronting American farmers," Heflin said. "Granting the Federal Trade Commission jurisdiction over agricultural cooperatives and farmers' associations is unnecessary and would only add to the production costs which are already threatening the future of American agriculture."

USDA's goal is energy self-sufficient farms by 1990

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Scientists at the U.S. Department of Agriculture are working on three broad fronts in an effort to help make this country's farms and ranches energy self-efficient by 1990.

Terry B. Kinney, Jr., administrator of USDA's Agricultural Research Service, briefly sketched the areas of scientific endeavor:

—One project focuses on developing alternative sources of energy, such as solar power for heating and crop drying, wind power for irrigation pumping, manure from cattle feedlots and herds as a biogas fuel, and farm-grown crops — including some weeds — that may be processed into fuels and substitutes for petrochemicals.

—Another project aims to improve the efficiency of plants in converting sunlight to food and extracting nitrogen from the air.

—Still another strives to save fuel by minimizing tillage, using sludge as a fertilizer, developing new irrigation techniques and other direct energy-cutting approaches.

One example of an energy-oriented research project that could pay off big, said Kinney, is the research on soybeans.

USDA researchers are trying to get soybeans to stop wasting carbon dioxide that the plant uses in making sugar in the

photosynthesis cycle. Success would mean that farmers could use a third less land and still harvest the same amount of soybeans, hence radically cutting the amount of energy needed to grow food.

About 25 percent of the carbon dioxide the soybean could use for sugar production and growth now is wasted in the photosynthesis cycle as plants change sunrays to food. Stopping that energy waste could lead to as much as a 45 percent increase in productivity for soybeans and other major

crops such as wheat and beets.

If a crop utilized 25 percent more carbon dioxide in synthesizing sugar in the plant, farmers could use a third less fuel to grow the same number of plants as before.

Kinney said more details about USDA research designed to save energy in agriculture are available in a 70-page publication, "Energy Research for the Farm." Copies may be obtained from the Office of Governmental and Public Affairs, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

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