

Congress Passes Ag Spending Bill

WASHINGTON, D.C. — According to National Farmers Union (NFU), the FY-2001 agricultural appropriations conference report will be beneficial to farmers and ranchers because it contains emergency assistance. But the farmer and rancher organization is disappointed that

Congress again missed an opportunity to address important long-term concerns of farmers, ranchers, and rural communities.

"We commend the members of the Congress for their work to provide needed assistance to crop, livestock, and dairy producers who have suffered greatly

from weather-related, production and quality disasters, as well as market-related losses that are out of their control," said NFU President Leland Swenson. "We are, however, disappointed that Congress, once again, has not chosen to address the failures of current farm, trade, and competition pol-

icy that have led to the lowest commodity prices in 20 years and economic crisis in our rural communities."

Farmers Union cites the legislation's failure to include long-term farm policy provisions that could stem the price crisis faced by producers today through an adequate safety net and meaningful trade sanctions reform. The bill severely limits U.S. farmers' opportunities to trade

with Cuba by restricting export funding and codifying travel restrictions to the island country.

"Farmers and ranchers are under tremendous economic pressure," said Swenson. "There is no excuse for not having these vital issues addressed when farm commodity prices are at crisis levels. We are grateful that the bill provides needed assistance to crop, livestock, and dairy farmers."

Successful Ohio Farms Need Good Environmental Management

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Most farmers want to do all they can to be good neighbors, and understanding what is needed for good environmental management should be on the top of their list, said Dale Ricker, Ohio State University Extension swine associate.

"Water quality and air quality are both on the top of people's mind, and we need to do as good a job as we can to ensure environmental quality is maintained, for our own safety and well being, as well as others," Ricker said.

Ricker, who completes environmental assessments of hog farms as part of the National Pork Producers Council On-Farm Environmental Assessment Program, has developed a list of helpful things livestock producers can do to better manage their

farms' environment.

It all starts with a manure nutrient management plan — a written plan outlining how farmers will manage the manure nutrients their operation produces and the resulting acreage needed. These plans are often developed with the help of local soil and water conservation district personnel.

"Producers who do not own enough ground for manure application often secure manure hauling agreements with neighbors or landlords to secure enough total acres for their manure management plan," Ricker said.

Manure analysis and soil tests accurately determine how much manure should be applied to particular fields. For example, a 1,000-head hog finishing operation may need 100 to 350 acres

for manure spreading, depending on existing levels of nitrogen and phosphorus in the soil and corresponding levels of nitrogen and phosphorus in the manure, Ricker said.

"If soil tests high in phosphorus, then a farmer may need a bunch of land for hauling, but if it is low in nutrients then more could be applied," he said. "Manure nutrient management plans ensure manure is not overlapped."

There are a number of private laboratories that will do soil and manure analysis, Ricker said.

Field maps are a good way to keep records of where, when and how much manure was applied in different areas. Farmers can mark on a field map what date manure was applied and shade in how much land was covered.

"This provides an accurate

written record that can be referred to for crop planning and future manure hauling events," he said. "Field maps also can help coordinate manure application with crop rotation because often as farmers rotate crops they also rotate the fields where manure is applied."

Livestock producers who store manure in pits or lagoons, often for six months to a year until application is appropriate, should keep a record of freeboard space — empty space left in the pit or lagoon until hauling is needed. If producers kept a weekly record of how fast the manure levels were rising and suddenly the rate changed, they would know to check for leaks or reasons for abnormal increases, Ricker said.

"A pit could fill rapidly because of a heavy rain, but there also could be an undetected water-

line break that could be fixed. Producers don't want to pay to haul excess water in manure, and the extra water could affect storage time," he said.

"Checking and recording freeboard space is a method

of tracking volume that could eliminate surprises." Air quality in a livestock building is often variable, depending on the time of year, and can have negative impacts on animals and workers. Air quality should be as good as possible to maintain animal growth, health and efficiency, and not expose animals and workers to gases that can build and cause problems, Ricker said.

"Periodically check air flows and make sure they are working as they are designed to work. Even in new facilities we sometimes see design flaws that impact the ventilation of barns," he said. "Air exchange rates and relative humidity are important to disease control through removal of contaminants."

Fans, shutters and air inlets should be regularly cleaned to remove dust and debris and ensure maximum efficiency of the ventilation system. It has been reported that dirty fan blades and shutters can reduce the capacity of a fan by up to 20 percent, Ricker said.

Testing farm water can document bacterial contamination, mineral content, hardness, total dissolved solids and pH. The pH of farm water should be between 6.5 and 7.5. Producers can take necessary action to correct water problems once they have been targeted, he said.

Finally, livestock producers should maintain the outward appearance of their operation to eliminate "conceptual odors," Ricker said.

"If an operation isn't neat, clean, well landscaped and doesn't look good on the outside, then people may ask how it could possibly be well managed on the inside," he said.

For more information about proper environmental management on the farm, producers can contact their county office of Ohio State University Extension or Soil and Water Conservation District. Interested people can get more information about the NPPC On-Farm Environmental Assurance Program by calling the Ohio Pork Council at (800) 320-7991.



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