

Ag Leaders Watch Farm Bill Developments

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farm bill laws has been five years, including 1996's "Freedom to Farm" bill, set to expire in September of 2002.

Redding said that the "unprecedented" 10-year length proposed for the new bill probably comes from lawmakers wanting to put more permanent policies in place to address the complexities of U.S. agriculture.

"The attitude in Washington is 'let's do this creature one time' (instead of once every five years)," he said.

Of particular interest to dairy producers is the fate of dairy compact legislation in the House's bill. Provisions which had allowed the Northeast Interstate Dairy Compact to exist, and would have allowed similar compacts to form in other regions of the country, expired Sept. 30. House lawmakers last week ruled out of order any new legislation to revive the compact provisions.

The comprehensive farm bill passed by the House must still go before the Senate before final approval. According to Redding, how the Senate responds to the bill will likely be determined by political factors.

"What will happen in the

Senate is a big question mark," he said.

Focusing on how the new bill would affect Pennsylvania farmers, Redding cited figures from 1998 and 1999 showing that government payments in Pennsylvania were \$.02 per dollar of farm production, compared to some midwestern and western states where the figure swelled, reaching as high as \$.24 per dollar in Montana and \$.27 per dollar in North Dakota.

Although such figures may give the impression that federal farm policy has little significance in Pennsylvania, Redding said the state's opportunities for involvement are growing.

"We know that (Pennsylvania) farmers are increasingly participating (in federal programs)," he said.

Although Redding acknowledged that the farm bill is primarily driven by grain rather than the livestock, dairy, and egg production which typify much of the agriculture in Pennsylvania and other eastern states, he pointed out that advantages here in infrastructure, diversity, and large numbers of consumers and food processors help balance the effects of uneven government funding.

One major area that Pennsylvania likely stands to benefit will be increases in conservation funding, including an expanded Conservation Resource Program, and nutrient management and water quality incentives.

"This will probably be one of the greenest farm bills we've ever had," Redding said.

Highlights of the new House Farm Bill include:

- Fixed payment subsidies would be expanded to include soybeans and other oilseeds.

- A 1996 law to establish dairy marketing loans would be rescinded. The government would continue to buy surplus butter, cheese, and nonfat dry milk powder. Dairies would still be required to pay farmers at least \$9.90 per hundredweight of milk.

- Countercyclical payments would be provided to crop producers when prices fall below established target rates.

- Conservation funding would increase by 75 percent. Three million more acres, for a total of 39 million, would be enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program.

- The food stamp program would receive \$3.7 billion in additional funding.

- Rural development initiatives would receive \$1.8 billion in additional funding.

- Mandatory research spending on plant and animal genom-



Russell Redding briefs local ag leaders.

Redding used part of the session to remind producers that Pennsylvania's Crop Insurance Assistance Program has been extended to include crop year 2002.

The program has enrolled increasing acreage since 1999 and is expected to exceed a million acres in 2001, Redding said.

Farmers can sign up free of charge for a catastrophic loss policy that provides payments on crop losses of 50 percent or more.

"Our goal is to get producers in Pennsylvania to sign up for crop insurance," Redding said. "This is one of the things government can do to fundamentally change the behavior of producers and how they view their business and risk management."

Remaining deadlines for enrollment are Nov. 20 for tree and vine crops and March 15 for spring plantings.

ics, food safety, biomass products, and natural resource management would be increased by 22 percent to \$145 million annually beginning in fiscal 2004.

Maryland Grain Producers Speak To Non-Farm Groups

EDGEWATER, Md. — Members of the Maryland Grain Producers Association are optimistic about the first year for their Speakers Bureau.

The Speakers Bureau is composed of 25 members of the agricultural community. Some are farmers, some involved agribusiness, and other employed by the Maryland Department of Agriculture and Cooperative Extension Offices. They have volunteered their time to do a

presentation entitled, "Food for Thought...Understanding Maryland Farms."

This is a 20- to 30-minute slide show/discussion addressing issues involving agriculture and is directed to non-farming groups in hopes of giving them a better understanding of agriculture and the importance it weighs on our lives.

To reserve a speaker, contact Celeste Pyper, Speakers Bureau coordinator at (410) 819-0414.

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