

President Signs Farm Bill, USDA Faces Distribution Chores

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WASHINGTON, D.C. — Now that the new farm bill is official, the nation's farmers are slated for a boost in conservation and price support funds.

While grain, cotton, and rice are the most heavily subsidized commodities, dairy farmers will also be eligible for payments during times of depressed fluid milk prices.

Farmland preservation funds were increased about 20-fold in the bill — "great news for farmland preservation in Pennsylvania," said Mary Bender, director of the Pennsylvania Bureau of Farmland Preservation.

President Bush signed the six-year legislation into law Monday, after it passed the U.S. Senate by a 64 to 35 vote and the House by 240 to 141 in prior weeks.

According to advocates of the new bill, price supports were boosted to reduce the need for providing emergency assistance to farmers, a common practice under the Freedom To Farm Act of 1996.

The bill has generated broad support from farmer organizations, including the American Farm Bureau Federation, the National Farmers Union, the National Corn Growers Association, the National Soybean Association, and Pennsylvania farm groups as well.

"This farm bill is the strongest yet in terms of conservation and benefits for the environment. The new farm bill puts in place a strong conservation program that includes incentives for farmers to improve resource conservation,"

said Joel Rotz, Pennsylvania Farm Bureau director of national legislative programs.

Others have expressed dissatisfaction with the new policies.

Kathy Lawrence, executive director of the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture, said the bill fails to address the needs of many of the nation's farmers.

"By promoting big industry over family farms and ranches, this bill spells trouble for agricultural communities, the environment, and consumers and we cannot support it," she said.

One initiative supported by Lawrence's group that remains in the final bill is the new Conservation Security Program, a measure that rewards farmers who practice environmental stewardship.

The new dairy program, which will provide direct payments to the nation's milk producers when the Class I price falls below \$16.94 per hundredweight in the Northeast, has met mixed reviews.

While a majority of Pennsylvania's dairies produce less than the 2.4 million pounds of milk that are eligible for funds, some in the dairy field worry that the subsidies will result in flooded milk markets.

"On average, this will be a boon for dairy farmers, but it will have size-specific effects. If you believe anything about economics, you would have to believe that more money for producers will mean that more milk will be produced," said Mark Stephenson, economist at Cornell University.

That could mean dairies with more than 400-500 cows may lose



Joined by government officials and the media, President Bush signs the new Farm Bill Monday morning.

more on lowered milk prices than they would gain from the subsidy payments, according to Stephenson.

Penn State dairy economist Ken Bailey said the effect of the program on milk supplies is difficult to predict.

"We will be getting more milk, but it's hard to say how much," he said.

The dairy program is in effect from December 1, 2001 through September 30, 2005. Dairy farmers will need to apply at their local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office in order to receive payments, Bailey said.

According to Rotz of the PFB, dairies with 70 cows averaging 18,000 pounds of milk can expect a \$5,600 check this fall.

Rotz's projections indicate average herds could receive a total of about \$8,800 for the year, and dairies producing up to the eligible limit could receive twice that amount.

While the PFB had supported dairy compact legislation that would have used money from the marketplace to sustain milk prices, Rotz said the Farm Bill provision will actually add up to more funds, especially for smaller farms.

With a large portion of the milk produced in Pennsylvania eligible for the subsidy, "the reality is that this program will pay more (than the compact would have)," he said.

Administered by the USDA through local FSA offices, the program will require an "incredible amount of work" to get the new regulations in place.

"There's no need (for dairy farmers) to watch the mailbox before this fall," Rotz said.

The new farmland preservation funds will be distributed to programs across the country. Both publicly administered and private, nonprofit farmland pres-

ervation groups will be eligible, according to Bender of the Pennsylvania Bureau of Farmland Preservation.

With \$50 million allocated before October 1 of this year and \$100 million for fiscal year 2003, the funding "shows how important farmland preservation has become nationally," she said. "We will be seeking our share here in Pennsylvania."

The Farm Bill also:

- Mandates an additional \$17.1 billion for conservation incentives.
- Raises subsidies for grain and cotton.
- Revives subsidies for wool and honey.
- Allows meatpacking corporations to continue owning livestock, overturning a Senate proposal to ban packer ownership.
- Requires country-of-origin labeling for meat, fish, produce, and peanuts, starting in two years.
- Allows corn, soybean and small grain producers to update yield and base acreage figures.
- Requires importers of dairy products to pay 15 cents per hundredweight to the dairy checkoff program to fund milk promotion activities.
- Expands an adjusted gross revenue insurance program for specialty crop producers, now in effect in six eastern Pennsylvania counties.
- Allocates \$405 million for bioenergy initiatives.
- Increases marketing loan rates.
- Provides new payments for peanuts, lentils, and dried peas.

USDA Seeks Nominees For National Dairy Board

WASHINGTON, D.C. — USDA is asking dairy producer and farm organizations to nominate candidates to serve on the National Dairy Promotion and Research Board. Nominations must be submitted by May 31.

The secretary of agriculture will appoint 12 individuals from those nominated to succeed members whose terms expire Oct. 31, 2002. The 12 new members will serve 3-year terms beginning Nov. 1, 2002, and ending Oct. 31, 2005.

Appointments will be made from nominations for the following: Region 2 (California); Region 3 (Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming); Region 4 (Arkansas, Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas); Region 5 (Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dako-

ta); Region 6 (Wisconsin); Region 7 (Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, and Nebraska); Region 8 (Alabama, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee); Region 9 (Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and West Virginia); Region 11 (Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania); Region 12 (New York) and Region 13 (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont).

For nominating forms and procedures, contact David R. Jamison, Chief, Promotion and Research Branch, Dairy Programs, AMS, USDA, Room 2958-S, Stop 0233, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-0233; telephone (202) 720-6909; fax (202) 720-0285; or e-mail at david.jamison2@usda.gov.

Agencies Announce Formation Of Wasting Disease Group

WASHINGTON, D.C. — USDA and the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) recently announced the formation of a joint working group on chronic wasting disease (CWD) to ensure a coordinated and cooperative federal approach to assisting the states with CWD response efforts.

"Working together with industry, states and other federal agencies is vital in further addressing this issue," Deputy Undersecretary of Agriculture Dr. Jim Butler said in testimony before a joint hearing of two House Resources Subcommittees. "In particular, working with the Department of the Interior will ensure the most efficient response to

CWD by coordinating the efforts of both departments in the areas of research, surveillance and management."

CWD is a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) of deer and elk. There is no evidence that CWD is linked to disease in humans, or in domestic animals other than deer and elk. The disease has been detected in wild deer and elk and in farmed elk herds. Wild deer and elk have been found with the disease in Colorado and Wyoming.

The first meeting of the joint working group on chronic wasting disease is scheduled for May 23.

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