

'Cash Cow' Brings Agriculture's Message To Washington

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WASHINGTON, D.C. — A cow on the U.S. Mall may be an unusual sight, but agriculture representatives from across America thought that an Ayrshire draped with a sign presented their message with clarity.

The cow's sign, "Don't Make Agriculture a Cash Cow for Class Action Lawsuits," embodied what 20 agricultural leaders prepared to present to legislative leaders from their respective states.

After a briefing at the White House, the group, which included hog farmers, poultry producers, tomato growers, food processors, a major grocery store chain, and

other ag organizations gathered on the Mall for a press conference to call on the U.S. Senate to pass the Class Action Fairness Act (S. 1712), a bipartisan bill that passed the U.S. House in March.

It is now pending in the Senate.

"There has been a dramatic increase in the number of frivolous class-action lawsuits filed against high tech, insurance, health care, manufacturing and financial services companies in state courts over the last decade," said Bryce Neidig, president of the Farm Bureau of Nebraska.

"Those of us in the ag sector are concerned that we may be the next target of these abusive lawsuits. Agriculture is vital to our

nation's economy, and Congress must take steps to assure that we do not become the next 'cash cow' for trial lawyers.

"Class-action reform would restore fairness to our legal system, reduce litigation expenses, curtail excessive class action suits, and protect consumers," said Neidig.

About 400 agriculture organizations have signed a letter of support of the bill. "It is a unique opportunity for us to have such broad-based support," he said.

While the ag leaders were in Washington, they planned to distribute the letter that asks for the passage of the act.

The letter states that "in recent years, our industry has come under increasing attack from frivolous class-action lawsuits. This dramatic increase in class-action lawsuits filings is impacting our industry's ability to do business and is having a severe impact on our nation's economy. S. 1712 would restore fairness to the class-action system, reduce litigation expenses, curb frivolous class action suits, and protect consumers."

In addition, the letter

states that the legislation would ensure that consumers, not lawyers, receive benefits of any class action settlement. Proper legislation would reduce the number of financially draining frivolous lawsuits that agriculture businesses have had to face, according to the letter.

Leo Bergeron, president of the

California State Grange, said that "the family farm is the backbone of agriculture. This type of action (frivolous lawsuits) would definitely break the back of the family farmer."

Dean Koplik, Murrays Chickens, New York, said that the

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Agriculture representatives from across the U.S. gathered to urge their senators to pass the Class Action Fairness Act to restrain frivolous class-action lawsuits. In the photo Kelly Jo Forrest stands at the halter of Anchor Mere CoDream.

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