



Food Safety Shakeup

By Harold

Earlier this month, President Obama's administration announced that it will seek Congressional approval to grant the President authority to consolidate government. But what does that entail? The administration does not give many specifics yet, but among those could be to consolidate USDA's Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Food Safety News reports that Obama administration officials favor such a merger because it would make food safety independent of USDA. Is this a good idea? Presidents have long had the power to organize the executive branch of government, subject only to Congressional veto. However, Congress ended those organizational powers away during the Reagan Administration. Recently, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has called for consolidation of all food-safety functions into a single agency. Several consumer activist groups also want one agency. Alaska Farmers Union asks: Why should we risk such drastic measures with our USDA that has served us so well over the decades with abundant supplies of safe food? How many drugs have been approved by the FDA only to later have dangers exposed after deaths and then pulled off the market by that same FDA that approved them in the first place. The USDA has served producers and consumers well ever since President Lincoln established an independent Department of Agriculture. The Alaska Farmers Union seeks to keep the USDA independent of other federal agencies.



From the President ...

December came and went and boy what has happened to January? We could sum it up as dark, cold, windy, and even colder but we would be missing out on all the other awesome stuff that is happening around us. Yet, winter takes its toll. Sad news when agriculture losses an Alaska great with the passing of Buzz Klebesadel. Every day we are reminded that time is short, and for some the likely hood is that it is shorter than for others. And, what do you do? I ordered seeds. If you don't plant it then you cannot harvest it. There is a time for everything but you have to live and living to a farmer is creation! At the end of this summer I will probably not remember a whole lot about the garden or even half the faces from the market. I will remember friends and family. So although things come and go individuals like Buzz leave lasting impressions, solutions, and direction for those to come. Take advantage of those "old timers" that are still around and learn about our past. More often than not the wheel you are trying to invent has already rolled away. Caught up in the day to day life is not so bad when you can say "the seeds are on their way."

In early January I participated in a legislative seminar put on by the Cooperative Extension Service in Anchorage. I was encouraged by some of the questions revolving around the Future Farmers of America. It is always good to talk with others about issues in agriculture. At this point Representative Bill Stoltz is having a bill written and will bring it to the legislative body. We can all applaud his service and time, so don't be shy about letting your representatives know about Alaskan FFA and lend your support to Bill. Amy Harmon is working tirelessly on the FFA stuff so if you have time you might check in with her and see if she needs help.

Please stand up for agriculture. We all care about our livelihoods and those that are struggling along side of us even if it is an ocean away. On the national scene there are big things happening. The closure of offices, consolidation of programs and the good times are rolling on prices. Hey, wait a minute. There have been a lot of years when prices were not that good and the belt got tighter, the budget leaner, and yet nationally agriculture is running and has run a surplus. Yes, I mean that instead of creating debt (in the trillions now), it has been a positive, hundreds of millions of dollars, and yet "they say" agriculture is way too expensive and we need to cut. Any time I hear the words they say it reminds me of what an old college professor used to say every time a student stood up and spouted, "they say". Professor Plumlee would instantly reply back "they say are damn liars". Maybe we don't need to go that far but when you hear someone criticizing agriculture just yell out loud, "Show me the money" and engage them in some real discussion. Have a great month and welcome to 2012. --Bob

Alaska Association of Conservation Districts

In the early 1930s, the soil conservation movement began in the U.S. when Hugh Hammond Bennett urged our country's leaders to address the "National Menace" of soil erosion. His persistence led to the creation of the Soil Conservation Service, which is now known as the Natural Resource Conservation Service. Even though this national agency was formed, President Roosevelt realized for this new creation to be effective, its programs would need to be at the local level where land owners could work with people they knew and trusted. The Territory of Alaska, understanding the importance of Soil and Water Conservation Districts in the lower 48, formed its first district, the Wasilla Soil and Water Conservation District in 1948. By 1983, the state began to invest in agriculture and the birth of the Natural Resource Conservation and Development Board (NRCDB) came about which hosted regional representation. The districts are a legal subdivision of the State of Alaska under AS 41.10, and thus the districts are empowered to develop and to carry out conservation programs that affect their respective district. Although the SWCDs fall under AS 41.10, they are not funded by the state and the employees are not state workers.

As the districts began to form across the State of Alaska, it became apparent to the local SWCDs needed to associate in order more effectively accomplish common tasks in their mission - to serve the land users of the state. As a result of this need, in 1965, the Alaska Association of Conservation Districts (AACD) was formed by the combined local boards of the Conservation Districts. In 1998, AACD became incorporated with 501 (c) (3) status. AACD has developed the infrastructure to coordinate District work in the execution of statewide natural resource concerns, such as invasive plants, soil erosion, and water quality, conservation planning, forest management and health, Streambank restoration and Salmon habitat enhancement, Levee erosion, and Recreational Trail improvement and rehabilitation.

As a non-profit organization, the Alaska Association of Conservation Districts complements the tasks of the NRCDB. The AACD assists the districts to do those things collectively that are difficult for them to do independently and provides the administrative support to the districts as they receive and expend funds to carry out programs and complete their mission.

Hoop House or Bust

By AFU President Bob Shumaker

Well if you are not familiar with the Hoop House program in Alaska then don't delay, call Keith at 373-6492 ext 101. If you are familiar but need information call the same number. Sure it is a government program and yes the program helps individuals get into the food security business. Food security means lots of things and the more individuals that take part in making our food supply safe is fine by me. The program is really simple. Growing our own foods is a pretty good idea. Less money going outside means more money in our local economy. Once you get into the program you don't have to look very far for help. There are many vendors selling high tunnels. I purchased mine right here in Alaska and have been please with the service as well as all the follow up help and advice. Since I got involved the program has changed but it is pretty much the same. Feel free to call me if you have some questions but my main advice is that if you think you have the time, give it a try. Over the years I have always maintained that the more you can influence growing conditions the more opportunities you have. Whether or not you get into the Hoop House program don't forget it is time to buy seeds. Hope to see you at the market.

2012 Farm Bill Challenges

By Harold

The 2012 Farm Bill faces significant challenges according to Congressman Frank Lucas, chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives Agriculture Committee. In a recent interview, he stated "I think (passage) is still possible but it is a tough lift," said Lucas. "All the farm groups will need to pull together." Furthermore, Lucas said that if the new farm bill is not passed by June, he believes it may not pass at all. In that event, the law would revert to the World War 2 era and regulations

crafted by the 1949 Farm Act, unless the current farm bill is extended until the 2012 version is enacted. Reverting to the 1949 Farm Act would disrupt agriculture and have many unintended consequences. One of the most difficult areas in passage of the new 2012 Farm Bill is the issue of preserving direct payments. According to Lucas "Outside groups have intensely attacked direct payments and it will cause tremendous battle on the floor." In speaking about the recent announcements by Agriculture Secretary Vilsack of cutbacks to USDA's Farm Service Agency, Lu-

cas commented "The federal budget is so far out of balance and the deficit has grown to such a tremendous degree we understand the cutbacks," said Lucas. "I understand the issue. It is a sign of how tough the budget process is going to be this year." AFU as well as NFU supports passage of the 2012 Farm Bill and requests that you write or email your elected officials in Congress without delay. Your help in getting the 2012 Farm Bill passed is crucial for a vibrant agriculture sector in America.

Extend Your Growing Season - Use a High Tunnel

Information Courtesy of Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

High Tunnels Qualify for the Environment Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) if they are:

- Placed on previously cultivated land
- Maintained for four (4) years
- Purchased as a manufactured kit
- At least six (6) feet tall

Definition

High Tunnels (Seasonal Tunnel Systems for Crops) are seasonal polyethylene covered structures used to cover plants to extend the growing season in an environmentally friendly manner. Seasonal Tunnel Systems depend on the plastic covering to modify internal climate to the advantage of the plants growing inside.

Purpose

High Tunnels are used to extend the crop growing season, improve plant quality, improve soil quality and improve water quality from reduced nutrient and pesticide transport. The growing season can be extended by 2-4 weeks by protecting crops from potentially damaging weather conditions. Due to the microclimate inside the tunnel crops tend to be of higher quality and produce higher yields than fieldgrown crops. Soil quality is improved by the use of increased management techniques in the tunnel, the addition of compost or organic matter and a decrease in the potential for soil erosion. As plants inside the tunnel tend to experience less disease and insect pressure, fewer pesticides are used reducing the risk of pesticide transport.

Where used

High Tunnels are used on land where crops are grown and an extension of the growing season is needed due to climate conditions and where crops can be grown in the natural soil profile. High Tunnels are not recommended for crops that are grown above the ground that do not utilize the natural soil pro-

file, or for plants grown in pots or containers.

Resource management system

High Tunnels are normally established concurrently with other practices as part of a resource management system for a conservation management unit. Examples include practices such as conservation crop rotation, irrigation water management, nutrient management and pest management. Managing crop residues within the tunnel can help improve soil quality. The cropping rotation used inside the tunnel shall have a positive soil conditioning index and a soil loss of less than the tolerable limit.

The irrigation water applied under the tunnel system shall not exceed the available water capacity of the soil to avoid runoff and leaching below the root zone. The sides of the tunnel structure shall be down and ends closed when pesticides are applied inside the structure and/or when pesticides are applied to crops adjacent to the tunnel structure.

Operation and maintenance

An operation and maintenance (O&M) plan must be prepared and reviewed with the landowner or operator. The O&M plan shall provide specific instruction for proper operation and maintenance of the system and shall outline the level of repairs needed to maintain the effectiveness and useful life of the seasonal high tunnel system. The covered area should be inspected periodically and repaired as needed. To prevent damage from heavy snow loads, the tunnel cover shall be removed at the end of the growing season.

Specifications

Structures shall be obtained from a commercial source. These structures,



sold as kits, generally contain all of the required materials and hardware to erect the structure except for the lumber needed for baseboards and end walls. Individual kits vary by supplier and manufacturer.

Seasonal High Tunnel structures shall be of adequate size to obtain 100 percent coverage over the crop area. The structure cover, at a minimum, shall be a made of 6-mil greenhouse-grade, UV resistant polyethylene. Center height of structure shall be a minimum of 6 feet. Bow spacing shall be a maximum of 4 feet. All materials shall be of significant thickness to withstand the temperature modification for the period required. To prevent damage from heavy snow loads, tunnel covers shall be removed at the end of the growing season.

High Tunnels, along with necessary appurtenances, shall be designed to provide a service life of not less than 4 years.

The High Tunnel structure must be planned, designed, and constructed in accordance with manufacturer's recommendation.

Online resources:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/programs/?&cid=stelprdb1046250>

<http://www.ak.nrcs.usda.gov/>

Upcoming Events

Feb 21-22: Produce growers conference in Palmer, Alaska

March 4-7: National Convention in Omaha, Neb.

March 14: NFU Beginning Farmer Institute Applications Due (More info: <http://nfu.org/education/adult-education>)

March 15-16: Sustainable Agriculture conference in Fairbanks, Alaska

June 21-23: NFU Women's Conference in Bailey, Colo.



Greetings from Washington! The National Farmers Union office is bustling with activity as our convention is rapidly approaching. If you haven't already done so, please make your arrangements to travel to Omaha for the convention to be held March 4-7. There are two hotels connected to the La Vista Conference Center, which is the site for a majority of the convention meetings. Hotel reservations need to be made by Feb. 18 in order to guarantee that you will get the Farmers Union discounted rate. Registration is also available online at www.nfu.org/convention.

Several tours in the local area will be offered on Monday, March 5, as a part of your convention registration. Final details on those excursions and speakers will be coming soon. You can find the breakout and general session topics and other information at www.nfu.org/convention.

The NFU Policy Committee held its first meeting in mid-January. This year's policy committee members are Dan McGuire of Neb. (chairman), John Daughenbaugh of Colorado (Rocky Mountain), Jeff Eschmeyer of Ohio, Sarah Lloyd of Wisconsin, Jeremy Scherler of Oklahoma, David Teigen of North Dakota, and Gail Temple of South Dakota. They have gone through much of the 2011 policy book line by line to make suggestions for changes to be voted on by the delegates at convention.

We will announce the results of our fundraising campaign for Feeding America at the convention. We have already exceeded \$42,000 and are well on our way to reaching our goal of \$50,000, which will be matched by Mr. Howard Buffett. If you have not yet contributed to the campaign, please consider doing so. Visit www.nfu.org/feedingamerica to see how \$1 can be turned into \$34 for hungry Americans. We look forward to presenting a check to Mr. Buffett at the opening banquet in Omaha.

We recently hired Leigh Slayden as acting vice president of membership. Leigh most recently served as the director of marketing and mem-

ber services at the Association of Public Health Laboratories. She has a tremendous background in membership and marketing, and she brings a number of new ideas to NFU.

NFU was disappointed when U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced in early January the closure of more than 250 of its facilities across the country.

While it should come as no surprise that FSA and other USDA service and research facilities are closing because of the continued emphasis on spending reduction, a "cut first, ask questions later" attitude in Congress toward investing in agriculture and rural America is now showing its true cost to farmers, ranchers and rural citizens with these closures.

According to USDA, 259 facilities across the country will be shut down. FSA offices will account for 131 of the closures, and agricultural research stations, Natural Resource Conservation offices, Rural Development offices and Food, Nutrition and Consumer Service offices, among other agencies, will account for the rest.

Our work is continuing with Dr. Daryl Ray and the team at the University of Tennessee on the second phase of the study on farmer-owned reserves that was released last fall. Dr. Ray will be at the convention and will host a breakout session that will cover his most recent findings which show major government cost savings while protecting net farm income, reducing price and income variability, and providing numerous additional benefits. For more information on the study, please visit www.nfu.org/study.

After convention, we will be gearing up for two exciting events this summer. The NFU Women's Conference will be held June 21-23, (three full days) at the NFU Education Center in Bailey, Colo. An agenda and registration will be available Feb. 15. The 2012 NFU All-States Camp will be held June 24 - 29. Please note this is a schedule change from previous years. Contact your state Farmers Union for eligibility requirements for future camps.

We all look forward to seeing you in Omaha! Stay in touch and have a prosperous new year!

CLASSIFIEDS

Have a classified ad you would like to place in the AFU News? Please contact President Bob Shumaker for details.

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