

Washington Report December, 2005

Congress Passes FY2006 Agriculture Appropriations Bill

The House and Senate approved the conference report on the FY2006 Agriculture appropriations bill and President Bush signed it into law on November 10, 2006. It was only the fourth of eleven FY2006 spending bills to make it through the entire legislative process. The \$100.2 billion Agriculture spending bill boosts spending on food stamps and nutrition programs but delays the implementation of country-of-origin labeling laws and maintains the ban on the reimportation of prescription drugs.

The bill funds USDA Research and Development programs at \$2.4 billion, a slight cut of \$9 million or 0.4 percent that stands in sharp contrast to a requested 15 percent cut because of hundreds of millions of dollars in earmarks. USDA intramural Research and Development funding declined 1.7 percent or \$22 millions to \$1.3 billion, primarily because of a drop in research and development facilities construction funding.

Congress rejected USDA's proposals to slash formula funds in its extramural research portfolio, and instead preserves a balance between formula funds, competitive funds, and earmarks. The final Agriculture appropriations bill keeps Hatch Act formula funding for land-grant colleges at \$179 million, in contrast to a USDA proposal to eliminate half of this funding and shift the funds to a new \$75 million competitive grants program. The National Research Initiative (NRI) of competitively awarded research grants increases slightly to \$183 million. Earmarked special research grants, however, grow from \$120 million to \$128 million. The FY2006 appropriation for Forest Service Research and Development is \$329 million, up \$15 million from last year.

The WSSA Provides Comments for the USDA-CSREES Stakeholder Workshop on Plant and Pest Biology Priorities and Concerns

On November 16, 2005, the USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) hosted a one day workshop on stakeholder priorities in the area of plant and pest biology. Over 20 different stakeholder groups provided comments and concerns during the workshop. Working in conjunction with the WSSA Research and Competitive Grants Committee, written comments were submitted along with an oral presentation by Dr. David Shaw, who did an excellent job in presenting WSSA's concerns.

The WSSA expressed its deep concern with the direction of the NRI Competitive Grants Program 51.9, The Biology of Weedy and Invasive Species in Agroecosystems. This is a significant source of competitively awarded funding for many weed scientists. This grant program now targets not only weedy and invasive plants, but all other invasive species without an increase in funding this year. There are other NRI grant programs that deal

with the biology of arthropods, nematodes, and microorganisms which were not opened up to invasion biology for their representative organisms. The WSSA stated that it would like to see invasion biology for different species placed in their respective NRI Programs.

Two other concerns the WSSA expressed for the current request for application (RFA) for the NRI Program on The Biology of Weedy and Invasive Species in Agroecosystems were: 1) its focus on ecological studies on invasive species at the population level and above with no emphasis on weed biology at the suborganismal level; and 2) the fact that this is the only NRI Grant Program that now requires a letter of intent, thus reducing the flexibility of weed scientists to consider other NRI Grant Programs and limiting the grant preparation period to less than 1.5 months.

The WSSA also provided comments to USDA-CSREES about the need for increased funding for weed science research in the following areas:

- **Weed Biology and Ecology-** Better understanding of weed biology and weed ecology is needed for development of more effective integrated weed management systems which utilize all tools available including cultural, mechanical, biological and chemical control strategies. Weed biology and weed ecology research is also needed to accelerate progress in several areas of weed management such as GPS/GIS based variable rate herbicide applications, herbicide resistant crops (HRC) and knowledge based decision support systems. The value of these management tools depends greatly on better understanding of the mechanisms of weed, crop and cropping system interactions. This includes research in weed genetics and physiology.
- **Invasive Weeds-** Predictive tools are needed to identify species of concern and potential for invasion into sensitive ecosystems. Systems for early detection and rapid response (EDRR) are also needed to combat potentially serious weed invasions caused by human activity, whether accidental or intentional. Development of tools to assess impacts of weeds on ecosystems, including threatened and endangered species, requires basic research on the mechanisms of plant invasion. Economic assessment tools are also needed to quantify the impacts of the problem and to help set management priorities.
- **Knowledge Based and Systems-Approach Based Decision Support Strategies-** With the proliferation of computer technology there are good opportunities to build decision aids that integrate biology and control data, expert knowledge and grower wisdom with social, economic and environmental perspectives. To build these systems, more long- term and large-scale studies are necessary with growers and advisors included in their development. The variable response of crops and weeds according to species, growth stage and environmental conditions also needs further research.

National Invasive Weed Awareness Week (NIWAW 7) is February 26- March 3 in Washington, DC

Details of NIWAW 7 can be found at: http://www.nawma.org/niwaw/niwaw_index.htm. On the website you can also register for the third and final on-line session that I will present in conjunction with NIWAW 7 titled: “Legislative Visit Preparation: Making Your Visit Count” which is January 23, 2006 at 4 PM (ET). Another on-line session you may be interested in registering for is “Media Relations 101: Growing Community Interest in NIWAW” which is on January 9, 2006 at 4 PM (ET). These interactive information sessions are conducted via Microsoft Live Meeting and sponsored by BASF.

During NIWAW 7, participants plan to advocate for two main policy issues while visiting Washington DC. A top priority issue is attaining funding for the Noxious Weed Control and Eradication Act (NWCEA) signed into law by President George Bush on October 30, 2004. NWCEA authorizes \$15 million to combat invasive weeds, but no funds have been appropriated to date. The other policy priority will be to urge passage of the National Aquatic Invasive Species Act (NAISA), which aims to improve existing legislation to better prevent introductions of new aquatic invasive weeds. There are several NAISA related bills in the 109th Congress and some parts of these bills may be drafted into a new piece of legislation by the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

EPA Issues Endangered Species Protection Program Guidance

The EPA published its “Endangered Species Protection Program Field Implementation Notice” in the November, 2, 2005 Federal Register. The document can be found at <http://www.epa.gov/fedrgstr/EPA-PEST/2005/November/Day-02/p21838.htm>. It formalizes a lengthy review process between EPA and other federal agencies on how the EPA addresses concerns about endangered species when it reviews pesticide registrations while not placing undue burden on pesticide users. EPA will implement the Endangered Species Protection Program through pesticide label statements that refer users to Endangered Species Protection Bulletins. These bulletins will only be issued when specific pesticide use limitations are necessary to protect federally listed species or their designated critical habitat and will be available via the EPA's Website or via a toll free number, both of which will be identified on the new pesticide label once it's available.

WSSA Provides Comments to the Canadian Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) on Herbicide Use in Rangeland

The PMRA (Pest Management Regulatory Agency) of Canada has been working with stakeholders to gain input on the practicality of prescribing no-spray buffer zones for protection of native plants in rangeland and aquatic habitats from the effects of herbicide spray drift. The PMRA is concerned that broadleaf herbicides may negatively impact native vegetation without the observance of spray drift buffer zones. I would like to thank John Jachetta from Dow AgroSciences for bringing this issue to the WSSA's attention

and would also like to thank the Canadian PMRA for seeking input from the WSSA on this critical land management question.

The question of the applicability of spray-drift buffers to rangeland is especially important to weed scientists and practitioners, as the unique issues that must be addressed in rangeland are not at all similar to those present in crops. Virtually all weed control applications in a rangeland setting are for invasive weed management. The main objective of rangeland weed management is to prevent conversion of the plant community to an invasive species monoculture and restore the natural balance of the site. If invasive weeds are not controlled in the buffer areas surrounding treatment sites in rangeland, a refugia for the weeds remains enabling them to reestablish in the treated site.

In cropland, the main objective of weed control is to remove plant competition and shift the use of the site's resources into the production of a single species, i.e., the crop. Under this management scheme, the presence of a buffer-zone around the site may be useful in fostering natural diversity and to provide refuge for birds and other species that would not prosper in the adjacent field. However, the application of such buffers to rangeland weed control will likely have the opposite effect. An unsprayed buffer in rangeland is likely to be little more than a refuge for invasive species and a source of seed for reinfestation of the treated area.

The WSSA would again like to thank the PMRA for seeking our input on this important rangeland management question.

Pesticide Product Information is Now Available for 90,000 Products in an On-line Searchable Data Base

The Pesticide Product Database includes the name of the product, the registration number of the product, company number and name, registration date, cancellation date and reason (if canceled) and product manager name and phone number. The Pesticide Product Database is a component of the National Pesticide Information Retrieval System (NPIRS) through the Purdue University Center for Environmental Regulatory Information Services (CERIS) at <http://ppis.ceris.purdue.edu/> - Questions may be directed to the NPIRS staff at 765-494-6561; e-mail: staff@npirs.ceris.purdue.edu

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