

## WASHINGTON REPORT

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### **Most Farm Bill Provisions Extended Nine Months**

In the strangest New Year's Day since I've been working in Washington, DC, the House and the Senate were both in session. Congress managed to compromise on fiscal cliff legislation to avoid an economic meltdown. Buried deep within the "American Taxpayer Relief Act" were provisions extending most Farm Bill programs through Sep. 30, 2013.

Two research programs whose legislative authority expired in 2012 were the Specialty Crop Research Initiative and the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative. Both programs were 'revived' in the farm bill extension legislation that provided them \$100 million and \$25 million, respectively, for 2013. Most biomass research programs in the energy title were extended as well. In the conservation title, however, the Wetlands Reserve Program and the Grassland Reserve Program were not reauthorized.

The 113<sup>th</sup> Congress, sworn in on Jan. 3, 2013, will be responsible for reintroducing and passing legislation for a 2013 Farm Bill that would reauthorize programs for five years. However, don't expect to see any Farm Bill legislation in the next couple months as Congress will be focused on sequestration and the debt limit ceiling issues that were not resolved in the fiscal cliff compromise.

### **New Ag Appropriations Committee Chairman**

With the new Congress, comes new chairman of both the House and Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittees. On the House side, Rep. Bob Aderholt from Alabama's 4<sup>th</sup> Congressional District will take over as chair from Jack Kingston of Georgia. Rep. Aderholt will be serving in his 9<sup>th</sup> term from northern Alabama and served as chair of Homeland Security Approps in the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress. Prior to his election to Congress, Aderholt served as an aide to Governor Fob James and as a Municipal Judge in Haleyville, Alabama. Educated through Alabama's public school system, Aderholt went on to graduate from Birmingham Southern College and from the Cumberland School of Law at Samford University.

On the Senate side, Sen. Herb Kohl from Wisconsin has retired from Congress after 24 years in office. That leaves the Senate Ag Approps Subcommittee chair open. As of press time, the Senate Appropriations committee had not officially named its twelve appropriation subcommittee chairs, but a likely replacement for Kohl is Sen. Tim Johnson from South Dakota.

There will also be a few changes on the authorizing side of ag policy in the next Congress. Most notable is that Sen. Thad Cochran from Mississippi will take over as Ranking Member on the Senate Ag Committee for Pat Roberts of Kansas. Sen. Cochran previously served as Chair of the Senate Ag Committee from 2003-2005 before going on to serve as Chair and Ranking Member of the full Senate Appropriations committee.

On the House Ag Committee, while Chairman Lucas (OK) and Ranking Member Peterson (MN) will remain the same, there are a number of new subcommittee chairs and ranking members. Most notably is new subcommittee chair Austin Scott from Georgia, who will have jurisdiction over research, education and extension, biotechnology, horticulture, pesticides and organic agriculture. Rep. Scott is in his second term as a Congressman. He graduated from the University of Georgia with a B.B.A. in Risk Management and Insurance, and owned and operated an insurance brokerage firm for nearly twenty years before his election to Congress in 2010.

### **Administrator Jackson Leaves EPA**

EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson announced she is leaving EPA, about a month after it was revealed she was using an alias email account to conduct official business. Jackson used a private email under the alias “Richard Windsor” to correspond with EPA colleagues, a decision her staff defended by saying that her official email account received too many messages for her to use it efficiently. Jackson spearheaded efforts to begin regulating greenhouse gas emissions, including setting new standards to clean up mercury and other toxic emissions from coal power plants, and established new fuel economy standards for motor vehicles.

Quick Senate confirmation of any successor appears unlikely, given that Republicans have long complained that Jackson’s aggressive approach to the job has hampered business and impeded job creation. Obama will be under pressure from his own party to name someone acceptable to environmentalists, but Republican senators and some Democrats from coal- and oil-producing states are likely to oppose confirming an activist to succeed Jackson.

In the mean time, EPA Deputy Administrator Robert Perciasepe will take over as acting administrator when Jackson steps down after the State of the Union address, assuming that a successor has not been named and confirmed by the Senate.

### **EPA Considering Invasive Weeds as Biofuel Crops**

EPA has been working on finalizing a rule which would allow fuel made from two known noxious weeds, *Arundo donax* (giant reed) and *Pennisetum purpureum* (napier grass or elephant grass), to count toward federally-mandated renewable fuels targets. The WSSA is opposed to the current proposed rule and has been working with other stakeholder groups to prevent the rule from becoming law. We need more research on *Arundo* and *Pennisetum* before incentivizing their production, otherwise the U.S. will make the same mistake it did in the 1930’s when it used taxpayer dollars to fund kudzu plantings across the south.

In October, more than 200 scientists from across the country, including many weed scientists, sent a letter to the Obama administration urging them to rethink their approach to potentially invasive plants grown for bioenergy. The National and Regional Weed Science Societies were also signatories on a letter to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), which is reviewing the EPA proposed rule. Under Executive Order 13112 (regarding invasive species), EPA should not provide production incentives for

high risk feedstocks such as *Arundo donax* without determining that the benefits “clearly outweigh” the costs.

If OMB moves forward with releasing the rule, we requested to see a complete assessment of the costs and benefits, as outlined in Executive Order 13112. Additionally, if EPA approves *Arundo donax* and similarly high risk feedstocks, we believe that the rule must include – at the very minimum— guidelines on stringent best management practices to reduce the risk of escape. These guidelines should be written with the guidance of the National Invasive Species Council and relevant federal agencies.

### **President’s Science Advisors Recognize the Importance of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Pest Management Challenges**

The President’s Council of Advisors for Science and Technology (PCAST) recommended to the President that the U.S. increase its investment in agricultural research by a total of \$700 million per year. This report has been in the making for a couple years and is really the first significant report on agriculture ever done by PCAST. The link to the report is at:

[http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/pcast\\_agriculture\\_20121207.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/pcast_agriculture_20121207.pdf)

The \$700 million per year recommendation is broken down as follows:

- i. \$180 million for new graduate and post-doctoral fellowships;
- ii. \$235 million for new competitively funded research at USDA AFRI;
- iii. \$130 million for basic research at NSF; and
- iv. \$150 million for new public-private institutes.

The most positive aspect of the report is the challenges they listed for 21st century agriculture:

- i. **Managing new pests, pathogens, and invasive plants.**
- ii. Increasing the efficiency of water use.
- iii. Reducing the environmental footprint of agriculture.
- iv. Growing food in a changing climate.
- v. Managing the production of bioenergy.
- vi. Producing safe and nutritious food.
- vii. Assisting with global food security and maintaining abundant yields

As you can see, weed science pretty much fits into all those challenges, especially their #1 challenge. However, it’s not all peaches and cream as the report “recommends that the focus of USDA research funding shift toward competitive grants, gradually rebalancing the research portfolio for intramural funding and funding for land grant institutions to incorporate incentives for innovation consistent with other research agencies across the Federal Government.” In other words, they don’t like capacity funds that support the Ag Experiment Stations and Cooperative Extension, or USDA-ARS funding.

The National and Regional Weed Science Societies are opposed to any shifts in funding towards competitive grants that results in cuts or reductions in capacity funds . Our

position has been to support funding for both intra-and inter-mural USDA research, extension, and education. There seems to be a bias in the report that competitively funded research in other federal agencies somehow produces more innovation and that USDA's research funds allocated through non-competitive means is somehow inferior. Yet few would argue that USDA's funding for research, education and extension has been an unparalleled success for food and ag production. If you are aware of any peer-reviewed, credible studies that have actually demonstrated otherwise, please let me know.

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