

news

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Budget conferees face farm issues

The Senate on March 26 passed a \$2.2 trillion budget resolution for fiscal 2004, which a conference committee will now have to reconcile with the budget resolution the House passed March 21. Both resolutions contain provisions that could affect farm programs.

During conference negotiations, the American Farm Bureau Federation will work to kill provisions that would cut \$18.6 billion, about 10 percent, from farm programs over 10 years and reduce the amount of farm payments individual farmers can receive. Conferees are expected to begin meeting April 1 to reconcile the differences between the Senate and House resolutions.

To lobby their members of Congress and ward off the farm program cuts, Farm Bureau members from around the country are flying in to Washington, D.C., this week.

The Senate resolution, which passed 56-44, could reduce the limit on farm program payments from \$360,000 per year to \$300,000 and would apparently do away with generic certificates. Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa), the author of the provision, said it would restore \$1.4 billion to the Conservation

Security Program. Earlier this year, Congress used funds budgeted for CSP, new in the 2002 farm bill, to pay for

\$3.1 billion in agricultural weather disaster assistance.

See Budget, page 2



Taking it to the streets

The Agriculture Department's Food Safety Mobile, a traveling presentation on safe food-handling practices, has begun its journey to public events around the country. See related story on page 5.

Urgency surrounds energy legislation

Whether it is the war in Iraq, the labor strike in Venezuela's oil industry or the rising cost of gas, current events are creating momentum behind comprehensive energy legislation.

"The U.S. economy and population will need more energy security in the years and decades to come," said Wayne Wood, Michigan Farm Bureau president, to members of the House Resources Committee during a March 19 hearing on energy security.

Wood offered Farm Bureau's position on how to reduce imports of oil and energy feedstocks and "make logical advancements" toward energy security.

"By acting this year, the 108th Congress can strike a balance of increasing the domestic production of conventional energy sources with the development of renewable energy sources," Wood said. "This action will result in lowering our reliance on foreign sources for our energy needs today and

contribute to America's energy independence for future generations."

The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee plans to vote on a comprehensive energy bill this week, and Rep. Joe Barton (R-Texas) recently released a draft energy bill similar to the bill (H.R. 4) that was passed in the House last Congress.

"With the world's current energy situation, and natural gas and oil prices as high as they've ever been, we can no longer afford to just talk about a national energy policy—we need to have one in place," Barton said.

The full House Energy and Commerce Committee this week is scheduled to vote on the House energy bill. Renewable fuels language is expected to be added by Chairman Billy Tauzin (R-La.).

Troy Bredenkamp, American Farm Bureau Federation energy specialist, said inclusion of a renewable fuels provision in the House bill is "very posi-

tive" because the House in previous versions of energy legislation did not include language on renewable fuels.

"The sticking point is not whether comprehensive energy legislation will include a renewable fuels standard, it's what its components will be," Bredenkamp said.

AFBF participated in a rally on Capitol Hill to promote the use of renewable fuels and passage of renewable fuels standard (RFS) legislation. Bredenkamp sat on a panel with Sara Glenn, Washington counsel for Shell Oil Company, and Chris Schepis, lobbyist for the National Farmers Union, to stress the importance of Congress passing RFS legislation as soon as possible.

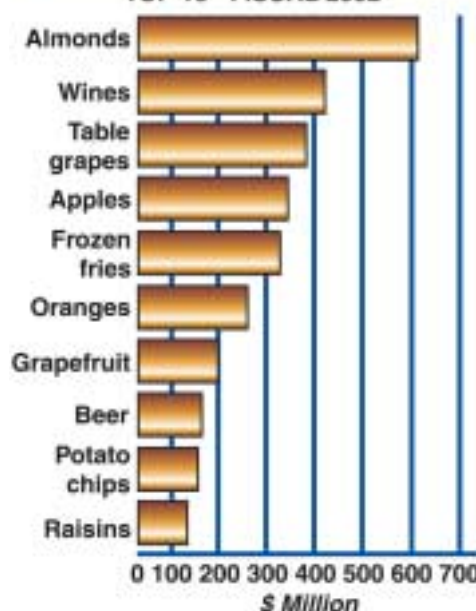
Bills that would establish national standards for the use of renewable fuels have been introduced in both the Senate and the House. Assistant Energy Secretary David Garman on March 20

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Corner Post

HORTICULTURE EXPORTS

TOP 10 - FISCAL 2002



Source: USDA Foreign Agriculture Service

VIEWPOINT

At tax time, reform is top concern for farmers

As America's farmers and ranchers dig in to determine their amount of Uncle Sam's due, it is easy to recall the adage that only two things in life are guaranteed—death and taxes. None of us knows when that first certainty will come to call, but all Americans are painfully aware of when the second one will. Yes, it's that time of year again.

Each year as I prepare my farm taxes, I am always struck by the tremendous amount of time and energy this task consumes. Someone once suggested that the effort to fill out income tax forms is more difficult than earning the reported income in the first place, but I doubt that person was a farmer or rancher.

Tackling tax issues

Tax issues are high on Farm Bureau's priority list. As our mission states, one of our main goals is to "improve the financial well-being" of farmers and ranchers. We take this task seriously. When it comes to this pocketbook issue, it seems there is always room for progress.

One of the most egregious taxes we battle is the estate tax—or death tax. Even though none of us knows when death will find us, when it does, the death tax is there, ready to plague our legacy and punish our loved ones.

Farmers work hard their entire lives,



paying taxes along the way. Most of us hope our years of labor will yield something to help sustain our survivors. Unfortunately, regardless of the attorneys, consultants and accountants we employ to help protect us, the death tax remains a thief that can pilfer large portions of any financial or farming heritage we leave behind.

Remember, these are assets on which farmers already have paid taxes. The death tax then slinks in to re-tax those same assets. This can result in heirs having to sell at least some of those assets to pay taxes and a family farm being broken up to pay death tax obligations.

The good news is that in 2001 Congress passed legislation that phases out death taxes by 2010. Unfortunately, it is currently scheduled to come back to life in 2011. Farm Bureau will vigorously support bills already introduced

in the 108th Congress to permanently kill the death tax.

Beyond the death tax

Capital gains taxes are another challenge for America's farm and ranch families. Because capital gains taxes are imposed when buildings, breeding livestock and farmland are sold, producers are discouraged from selling unneeded assets and putting them to more productive uses.

Capital gains taxes threaten the transfer of farmland because sellers price their land and buildings in order to recover the cost of the taxes. This increases the price of farmland needed by beginning or younger producers and increases the likelihood that farmland will be sold for other uses. We will work to reduce capital gains taxes during the 108th Congress.

We also support a new and innova-

tive risk management tool, called Farm and Ranch Risk Management Accounts (FARRM). This provides tax deferment to help farmers save for years when prices are low or crops are poor. This type of self-insurance program will help producers weather the ups and downs of the farm economy.

In addition, Farm Bureau continues to watch the CARE bill tax package. This would provide farmers and ranchers enhanced tax deductions for charitable and humanitarian donations of food and commodities. Those of us who donate farm products deserve the same tax break that corporations and others already enjoy.

Thanks to President Bush's leadership, we all may soon enjoy much-needed tax relief. His common-sense tax reform package incorporates several items that benefit all taxpayers. Farm Bureau, of course, specifically supports those items that will benefit farm and ranch families, including expanding the small business expensing limit. We applaud the administration's efforts in making tax reform a national priority.

The list of tax issues that are ripe for reform is long, but another of life's certainties is that Farm Bureau is in this fight for the long haul. Our hope is that someday the "guarantee" of taxes in our lives won't feel so much like a death sentence.

Sense of urgency surrounds energy legislation

continued from page 1

told a Senate subcommittee that President Bush would accept a stand-alone bill establishing a renewable fuels standard if agreement could not be reached on comprehensive energy policy.

Deputy Energy Secretary Kyle McSlarrow earlier this month urged Con-

gress to enact comprehensive energy legislation that includes a renewable fuels provision.

"The administration strongly supports a renewable fuels standard that will increase the use of clean, domestically produced renewable fuels, especially ethanol, that will improve the nation's energy security, farm economy and environment," McSlar-

row said in testimony before the House Energy and Air Quality subcommittee, which Barton chairs.

McSlarrow added that the administration would like to see certain tax proposals, such as a tax credit for biomass and wind and an extension of the ethanol tax exemption, included in comprehensive energy legislation.

The Senate recently voted down a

key energy priority for the Bush administration. An amendment to strip language from the fiscal 2004 budget reconciliation measure allowing oil exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) passed 52-48. Farm Bureau opposed the amendment. ANWR language is expected to resurface during House consideration of an omnibus energy package.

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Budget conferees face farm issues

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The House resolution, which passed 215-212, does not contain the payment limit reduction, but would slash mandatory funding for farm programs, crop insurance and nutrition assistance by \$600 million in 2004, \$5.5 billion by 2008 and \$18.6 billion by 2013. AFBF opposes payment limits and any reopening of the farm bill.

To gain sufficient support to pass the House resolution, House Budget Committee Chairman Jim Nussle (R-Iowa) promised to work during conference to restore farm bill funding through 2008. Rep. Jo Ann Emerson (R-Mo.) and Rep. Larry Combest (R-Texas), former House Agriculture Committee chairman, withheld support for the resolution until receiving Nussle's commitment.

"Farm Bureau is grateful to Combest and Emerson for standing up for agriculture," said AFBF President Bob Stallman. "There is never a good time to reduce support for our farmers and ranchers. But with continuing hardships in the farm economy, weather disasters and growing demands for farmers to produce more while protecting the environment, there couldn't be a worse time to cut farm programs."

Nussle wrote the two members of Congress that, "It is my intention to work with the Agriculture Committee to ensure that the level of savings the Agriculture Committee is required to achieve is attributable to waste or fraud, with no negative impact on farm programs or crop insurance."

Conferees will also have to reconcile the difference between the two resolutions' funding levels for President Bush's economic growth and stimulus package, estimated to cost \$726 billion.

A successful amendment offered by Sen. Russell Feingold (D-Wis.) cut the funds available for tax cuts by \$100 billion, with the savings to help fund the war in Iraq. Then an amendment offered by Sen. John Breaux (D-La.) to reduce the amount to \$350 billion passed 51-48.

Members of Congress are trying to complete the budget resolution before they leave for the spring recess on April 11. Congress typically tries to finish the budget resolution by April 15.

One WTO deadline passes, another approaches

As the March 31 deadline for agreeing to "modalities" in the World Trade Organization agriculture negotiations comes and goes, the American Farm Bureau Federation is looking down the road to the next big deadline in September.

Farm Bureau hopes that, despite missing the March 31 deadline, WTO member countries will still get their offers on the table by the time trade ministers gather in Cancun in September to take stock of proposals and offers and begin the next phase of the negotiations, in which countries would review all offers and make counteroffers.

There are only 15 months between when the Cancun ministerial meeting takes place and the Jan. 1, 2005, deadline for all negotiations to be completed. If the extended modalities phase goes too long, it could steal away critical time needed for the work that remains. If an agreement cannot be reached by the WTO deadline, it will become even more difficult for the United States to secure reductions in other countries' trade barriers, mainly

because the president's trade promotion authority expires in June 2005. Other countries will be less willing to negotiate with the United States if it is not able to present final offers that don't require advance approval by Congress.

Even with the schedule becoming tight, AFBF President Bob Stallman has said U.S. negotiators should not give up on their quest for more open trade and fairer subsidy limits in agriculture.

"We don't really think we need to compromise further," Stallman said. "What we need to do is to have an agricultural document that truly liberalizes trade in agriculture and tries to level the playing field so our producers can compete in international markets that are closed to them now."

Stallman's comments came during his recent visit to Geneva for a meeting of the WTO's agriculture committee, where Stuart Harbinson, chairman of the committee, circulated a second paper on the compromises he said are needed to reach a final agreement. Stallman said the targets included in Harbinson's paper would not phase out export subsidies fast enough and

would leave in place wide disparities between countries' allowable domestic subsidy and tariff levels.

"Unfortunately, it doesn't meet the U.S. goals of really trying to level the playing field," Stallman said.

Japan, the European Union and other countries also criticized the paper, saying it would require too much liberalization of them, while it excluded non-trade concerns like precaution on biotechnology, protecting animal rights and geographic preferences for foods historically produced in a certain region. The United States opposes including non-trade concerns in any agriculture agreement.

WTO member countries' ability to meet the March deadline has been in doubt for some time, primarily because the EU, Japan, Switzerland, Norway, India and other countries have not budged from their hard-line positions against harmonizing the maximum subsidies allowed at lower levels and lowering tariffs and other trade barriers.

The EU, in particular, is holding out for an agreement that maintains the same subsidy formulas agreed to 10

years ago in the Uruguay Round of negotiations, an agreement that U.S. agriculture believes has offered only limited benefits for the United States.

The EU is refusing to give way on the "three pillars" of the negotiations, which include eliminating export subsidies, harmonizing and reducing domestic subsidy limits and lowering tariffs, unless other countries agree to establish non-trade concerns. U.S. trade officials say the EU just wants to use non-trade concerns to protect its own farmers by offsetting the impact of any other concessions it might have to make.

Several countries hope to gain greater market access in other sectors in which negotiations are taking place concurrently with the agriculture talks. Negotiations are under way on intellectual property, services, investment, environment, regional trade agreements and other topics. Other countries' interest in greater access to the U.S. market for other goods and services could eventually bring concessions in agriculture, but time is beginning to run out.

Lawmakers want end to U.S.-Mexico sugar saga

As the dispute over sugar between the United States and Mexico presses on, a bipartisan group of legislators is ready for sweetener trade to get back on track.

House Budget Committee Chairman Jim Nussle (R-Iowa) and Rep. Cal Dooley (D-Calif.) spearheaded a letter to Juan José Bremer, the Mexican ambassador to the United States, urging immediate resolution to the dispute so sweetener trade between the two countries could resume.

"It is clear that both U.S. and Mexi-

can farmers and processors in this sector have a lot to gain from a negotiated solution," the letter said. "We believe it is possible, and necessary, to make every effort to finalize the outstanding issues that remain and announce a good deal that will benefit stakeholders on both sides of the border.

"The consequences of not reaching a deal are great and will undoubtedly jeopardize a very large and growing agricultural trade relationship under the [North American Free Trade Agreement]."

A total of 31 House lawmakers signed the March 14 letter.

The United States and Mexico have been trying to resolve trade differences over high fructose corn syrup (HFCS), sugar and bulk corn for several months.

Mexico contends that, under NAFTA, it is able to export all of its surplus sugar duty-free to the United States. The United States holds that NAFTA limits Mexico's access to the U.S. sugar market.

Additionally, the United States has

not been able to export HFCS to Mexico for 15 months. According to the Corn Refiners Association, for every 300,000 metric tons of HFCS access into Mexico, U.S. corn producers have lost market opportunities for more than 20 million bushels of corn. "Unfortunately, [the Mexico HFCS] market remains elusive and as a result of Mexico's protectionist actions, our industry has idled capacity, lost jobs and experienced significant losses in profitability," said Audrae Erickson, CRA president.

Iraq war raises questions on food aid, trade impact

Less than a week after the start of the war with Iraq, the first shipment of food and water arrived at the southern Iraqi port Umm Qasr on March 26.

As the humanitarian effort in Iraq gets into full swing, President Bush asked Congress for \$320 million in additional funds to put toward food aid. The funding for food aid is part of Bush's \$75 billion supplemental request to cover costs of the war.

"To the extent that we can use American commodities, we will do that," said Andrew Natsios, U.S. Agency for International Development administrator, during a March 25 briefing at the State Department on the humanitarian effort in Iraq. Natsios said USAID has so far given \$60 million to the United Nations' World Food Program, which is delivering food aid in Iraq. He noted that while the United

States is the largest donor of food and supplies for Iraq, many other countries and aid agencies are contributing.

"This is not just an American effort; I want to emphasize that," Natsios said.

The Agriculture Department has authorized the release of 200,000 tons of U.S. wheat from a federal grain reserve to go to the people of Iraq, with another 400,000 tons available as needed.

In anticipation of military action in Iraq, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan earlier this month ordered the evacuation of weapons inspectors and humanitarian staff from the country and suspended the oil-for-food program.

The oil-for-food program allows Iraq to sell unlimited amounts of oil to buy food and medicine. According to the UN, the program has delivered \$26 billion worth of humanitarian supplies to

Iraq since it began in 1996.

Sixty percent of Iraq's 27 million people rely on government rations for their food and medicine.

Questions have emerged on whether the war with Iraq will disrupt the current round of World Trade Organization trade negotiations. Teresa Howes, American Farm Bureau Federation trade specialist, said the war should not affect WTO trade talks because "trade and foreign policy are separate issues. Trade officials deal with trade, and foreign policy officials deal with foreign policy."

She added that the United States has shown a strong commitment to meaningful global trade reform by taking a leadership role throughout the WTO agriculture negotiations. Howes said that European Union member countries do not want to compromise when

it comes to farm trade, and opposition to the war with Iraq would be a "convenient excuse" for some countries to disengage from negotiations.

On a recent trip to Geneva, AFBF President Bob Stallman said that he had met with delegates from several countries to "get an opinion as to whether or not the U.S.-Iraqi situation is creating any problems in the [WTO] negotiations." Stallman said that he did not see problems at the "working level" and that the negotiators in Geneva were continuing to work toward agreement on farm trade. March 31 is the deadline for WTO trade officials to reach agreement on agricultural negotiations (see related story on this page).

Separately, an increase in security at border crossings and ports could affect trade in the region by slowing shipping and product distribution.



Keep America's food and agriculture safe

The Agriculture Department suggests the following actions for producers and members of the agricultural community to help protect the nation's food system.

For producers:

- Make a plan to manage risk.
- Train employees and customers; screen potential hires.
- Secure hazardous materials, energy and water sources, and such production inputs as feed and nutrients.
- Prevent unauthorized entry or access to production sites.
- Report any suspicious activity.

For the agricultural community:

- Be alert and aware of suspicious activities surrounding food and agriculture operations.
- Immediately report any suspicious activities to your local law enforcement agency.
- Update emergency phone numbers and keep them accessible at all times.
- Consider escorting all visitors and inspecting all vehicles entering facilities and operations.
- Increase surveillance around operations and consider improvements to physical facility security.
- Consider restricting public access and events, such as tours and lectures.

On the Net: <http://www.usda.gov/homelandsecurity>.



PHOTO COURTESY OF USDA

Agriculture Department inspectors are the first line of defense against tainted meat imports, but they need to do a better job, according to an internal audit.

USDA wants more power over processors

The Agriculture Department is considering asking Congress for greater authority to require information from meat processing plants, impose penalties for not complying with food safety regulations and issue cease-and-desist orders and suspensions of USDA inspection, effectively shutting a meat plant, on an expedited basis in the event of a violation.

During remarks to the Food Safety Summit in Washington, D.C., Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman discussed the need to "modernize" the department's regulatory tools to beef up meat safety and ensure consumer confidence in the food supply.

"We have taken numerous actions to reduce pathogens," Veneman said. "However, we need to modernize our regulatory tools to make additional progress throughout the food system."

The department is considering requiring meat plants to notify USDA when the establishment has reason to believe that meat or poultry has been adulterated or misbranded. The department is also considering seeking the authority to impose civil penalties if a plant fails to comply with food safety laws even after it has been notified of a problem in writing. The department may also consider cease-and-desist orders and expedited suspensions arising from violations under the Hazard Analysis and Critical Con-

trol Points (HACCP) system of identifying and addressing potential problems.

The actions would be consistent with American Farm Bureau Federation policy that supports HACCP and effective food safety programs.

To increase its authority, the department would need to seek changes to the Federal Meat Inspection Act and the Poultry Products Inspection Act. USDA has said it will seek input from industry and consumer groups before it proposes legislation.

Veneman said the changes were not the only options the department might consider, and it would work with interested parties to explore other ideas for enhancing food safety systems and providing incentives for compliance.

The changes the department is considering would partially respond to a request by Democratic members of Congress and consumer groups for stricter regulation of meat processing plants. In a March 12 letter to Veneman, five members of Congress called for stepped-up penalties and requirements to turn over positive results of tests for pathogens.

Veneman and USDA have been criticized for waiting until after people have already been sickened from consuming tainted meat, and until too long after test results and inspections

reveal the presence of pathogens or sanitation problems, before requesting meat recalls or suspending federal inspection. The criticism stems from recalls of 27.4 million pounds of listeria-contaminated turkey and chicken last October and 18 million pounds of E. coli-contaminated ground beef last July.

In her remarks at the food safety summit, Veneman outlined "aggressive steps" she said the department was already taking, including increasing the food safety budget 15 percent between 2001 and 2004. However, the budget increase is based, in part, on a proposal to collect user fees from industry for federal inspection services. In congressional testimony last week, Elsa Murano, USDA undersecretary for food safety, said the department would look to Congress to come up with the funds to fill the gap if it does not approve the user-fee proposal.

AFBF opposes user fees for meat inspection services because of concern that it would result in higher consumer costs for meat products, and out of principle that federal services to consumers should be paid for from general revenue funds.

Veneman also said the department would upgrade existing training programs for inspectors and increase its efforts to educate consumers about safe food-handling practices.

Imported meat needs better inspection

The Agriculture Department is not doing all it should to make sure imported meat is safe, according to a recently released internal audit.

USDA conducted an internal audit of the imported meat and poultry reinspection process, which is administered by the department's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS). The Office of Inspector General (OIG) at USDA performed the audit to ensure meat entering the United States is "safe and wholesome."

OIG found that FSIS had made only "minimal progress" toward implementing an effective import reinspection process.

"Unclear lines of responsibility, lack of procedures and lack of management oversight adversely affected FSIS' actions to correct past deficiencies, manage eligibility data used in the reinspection process and clarify agency

authority over imported product," the report said.

OIG reported that from 1999 to 2001, 823,632 pounds of meat came into the country from foreign establishments with "questionable" eligibility to export to the United States. USDA records for shipments before 2000 have already been tossed out. But of the 220,934 pounds of product shipped between 2000 and March 2001, the department's records show that 66,299 pounds of product, or about 30 percent, was ineligible to enter the country. Its records on the remaining 154,635 pounds of product are insufficient to say whether it should have been allowed in.

Garry McKee, FSIS administrator, responded to the audit, saying that FSIS "generally agrees" with recommendations made in the report. He listed "continuing efforts" to improve

import operations, including strengthening policies and controls, addressing resource issues and enhancing training for inspection personnel. McKee said FSIS plans to have deficiencies in the meat import system remedied by September 2003.

Separately, in response to the increase in the terrorism threat level, the Agriculture Department said it would take appropriate actions to protect U.S. food and agriculture systems and USDA employees and facilities. Veneman said that since Sept. 11, 2001, USDA has hired 20 additional Import Surveillance Liaison inspectors, focusing specifically on food security, to be deployed at strategic points of entry to reinspect imported meat and poultry products.

FSIS on March 27 held a public meeting to discuss strategies for improving food safety worldwide.



Efforts to protect food supply intensify

With the nation at war and the threat of terrorism heightened, agencies within the federal government have combined their resources to protect the nation's food supply.

Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman recently told attendees of the 2003 Food Safety Summit that the Agriculture Department, along with the Department of Homeland Security, are taking extra steps to monitor the food chain. USDA is part of a coordinated effort among federal agencies to ensure the U.S. food supply is secure.

For example, USDA has alerted state and private authorities to closely watch activity at feedlots, stockyards, processing plants and import and storage areas. USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service began testing for chemical and biological agents in its routine meat and poultry inspections.

The Department of Health and Human Services has increased scrutiny when inspecting imported food and is working on the federal, state and local levels to disseminate information on

imported food issues and potential food pathogens. And the Food and Drug Administration has instructed food processing plants to conduct employee background checks, ban workers from carrying personal items into food storage areas and train them to identify suspicious behavior.

"Since Sept. 11, 2001, USDA has worked aggressively with federal, state and local agencies to strengthen our infrastructure, better prepare for emergencies, and improve coordination and response mechanisms," Veneman said.

Announcements of continued efforts to ramp up food security coincided with a recent report by the General Accounting Office that found the government could not ensure the security of food processing plants.

USDA and FDA have both issued voluntary guidelines to help food processors identify and prevent the risk of deliberate contamination at their plants. The report found that food processors are implementing numerous security

measures, but because the federal guidelines are voluntary, the agencies do not monitor and document processors' implementation of such measures. Therefore, the extent to which food processors have adopted security guidelines is unknown, the report said.

Most food processing facilities have implemented some types of security measures, such as putting up fences and hiring more guards, GAO found when surveying FDA and USDA field inspectors. "However, the inspectors were less able to comment on security measures that were not as obvious, such as accounting for missing stock and implementing proper mail-handling practices," the report said.

GAO recommended that the agencies identify what authority they may need in order to reduce the potential for deliberate contamination of the nation's food supply. Further, GAO urged the agencies to provide training for food inspection personnel so they can work with plant managers to increase awareness and security.

Foodborne bacteria may be in for a shock

In the future, meat processors or consumers may expose meat to shockwaves to ensure it does not harbor dangerous bacteria. At the same time, they could tenderize the meat.

Tests at the Agricultural Research Service's (ARS) Food Technology and Safety Lab on the tenderizing effects of hydrodynamic pressure (HDP) wave technology have shown promise in the battle against some of the most problematic microorganisms in meat, including *E. coli*, salmonella and listeria.

Researchers vacuum seal a cut of meat in heavy-duty plastic. The meat is then placed on top of a steel plate in the bottom of either a steel chamber or small plastic garbage can. They found that the garbage can works best for killing bacteria. The chamber or can is filled with water. Then a small amount of an explosive is detonated, creating a soundwave that passes through the meat, bounces off the steel plate and passes back through the meat, severing the stringy striations that can make meat tough.

This happens within fractions of a millisecond," said Dr. Morse Solomon, research leader at the ARS lab in Beltsville, Md.

Solomon's research started in 1992

as a way to improve meat tenderness. Thinking about the soundwaves' impact on meat structure led him to think it could also rip apart the bacteria that sicken thousands of people every year.

One of the easiest ways to kill bacteria on food is to cook it thoroughly. But there is ample room for consumers or food preparers to make the mistake of not cooking meat to the necessary temperature. Non-thermal means are "a whole other league" of bacteria-killing methods, according to Solomon. There are few ways to kill bacteria throughout a piece of meat without using heat. HDP is one; irradiation is another. Both are effective, according to Solomon, but irradiation is the most effective.

"But the neat thing is we're in that same league, being able to non-thermally kill bacteria throughout the meat," he said. "And at the same time, if it's a tough piece of meat, we're making it tender. Right now, there's no other process that can do that."

The bacteria that are killed by irradiation but not killed by HDP waves are not pathogens, and HDP does not kill "good bacteria" like lactobacilli, which help humans ward off infections.

Solomon and the other researchers have eaten meat treated with HDP waves. He said there is no change in the taste. He has also allowed others to taste test meat that he has treated, versus untreated meat.

"I've had people say, 'I don't believe that piece came from the same animal as this one over here,'" said Solomon. "It's unbelievable. It goes from being objectionably tough to very tender."

The technology isn't ready for primetime. For starters, the meat industry isn't going to be willing to blow up plastic garbage cans for every piece of meat they process. But Solomon hopes that by looking at why and how soundwaves affect the texture of meat, his research might lead to other soundwave technology that is safe and user-friendly.

"We're at least five years away from having something we could transfer to industry," Solomon said. "But we have some alternatives that look promising."

He said the technology could even bypass the meat processing industry. He envisions a breadmaker-sized machine that could be used in the home to tenderize and sanitize meats as well as other foods.

Food safety RV hits the road

The Agriculture Department is taking its food safety message on the road with a nationwide tour to educate consumers about the importance of handling food properly in order to reduce the risk of foodborne illness.

USDA has outfitted a 35-foot recreational vehicle to deliver food safety messages to some 100 communities across the country, where food safety experts will provide information to consumers and demonstrate food safety techniques.

The Food Safety Mobile starts its journey across America at the Tampa Bay Blues Festival in downtown St. Petersburg, Fla., April 4-6. Then it will head to Louisville, Ky., on April 12 for the 2003 Kentucky Derby; and to San Antonio, Texas, for Fiesta 2003, April 19-27.

The mobile will also appear at other community and USDA-sponsored events.

"Foodborne illness is preventable," said Dr. Elsa Murano, USDA undersecretary for food safety. "We want to empower consumers through education, and the USDA Food Safety Mobile will provide us with face-to-face access to millions of consumers."

On the Net: www.fsis.usda.gov/food_safetymobile.



PHOTO COURTESY OF USDA, ARS

Dr. Morse Solomon (right), an Agricultural Research Service scientist, and an assistant examine the bacteria-killing effects of hydrodynamic pressure waves on meat.

FOR THE RECORD

Roll Call vote vote vote vote vote vote vote

Votes on ANWR, death tax, ag spending

Vote 1 — March 19, 2003

The Senate passed, 52-48, an amendment to concurrent resolution 95 on the fiscal 2004 budget. The amendment, offered by Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) prevents oil exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Farm Bureau favored a "nay" (N) vote.

Vote 2 — March 20, 2003

The Senate passed, 51-48, an amendment to concurrent resolution 23 on the budget for fiscal 2004. The amendment, offered by Sen. Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.), provides \$46 billion to pay for repealing the estate tax in 2009, a year earlier than under current law. Farm Bureau favored a "yea" (Y) vote.

Vote 3 — March 21, 2003

The House passed, 215-212, concurrent resolution 95 on the fiscal 2004 budget. The resolution instructs the Agriculture Committee to reduce spending on mandatory farm programs authorized in the 2002 farm bill by \$18.6 billion between 2004 and 2013. Farm Bureau favored a "nay" (N) vote.

LEGEND: Y,y — yea N,n — nay ? — not voting

Table listing votes for various states including Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

Table listing votes for various states including Mississippi, Missouri, North Dakota, Ohio, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

Iowa Farm Bureau Hog Jog gears up for second year

There are hogs that are destined for the packinghouse and America's dinner tables, and then there are hogs that are meant for cruising down the highway. The Iowa Farm Bureau Foundation has brought these two types of hogs together in a unique fund-raising event.

Following a successful debut in 2002, the IFB Foundation is gearing up for the second annual "Hog Jog" planned for June 7 at the Iowa State Fairgrounds. Runners, walkers and bikers will participate in the event, which also is sponsored by Zylstra Harley-Davidson of Ames and World Pork Expo.

"Support for Hog Jog was tremendous (last year)," said Deb Yount-Woods, Iowa Farm Bureau's director of leadership development and implementation. "Everyone involved enjoyed the opportunity to have some fun and, at the same time, provide much-needed funds to increase the quality of life for Iowans."

Hog Jog raises funds for the IFB

Foundation for use in educational programs and activities that address farm income, education and health initiatives. More than 175 runners, walkers and bikers gathered for the 2002 event.

This year's Hog Jog will take place in conjunction with the 2003 World Pork Expo and includes a parade of Harley-Davidson motorcycle riders, runners and walkers. The 10K runners, 5K runners and walkers begin with a tour of the Iowa State Fairgrounds at 7:30 a.m. Motorcyclists and their passengers will start their day at 9 a.m. for a 60-mile cruise.

Motorcyclists will be competing for "Executive Choice" and "People's Choice" awards. Performance awards will be given by age in both male and female running categories. Each participant will receive a T-shirt, a National Pork Producers Council pin, entrance into the World Pork Expo and entrance into a drawing for various prizes. Live music and other contests are also part of the fun.



Hogs—of the two-wheeled variety—and their riders will join runners and walkers at the second annual Iowa Farm Bureau Hog Jog on June 7 in Des Moines to raise funds for agricultural education.

"Hog Jog is an opportunity for people to show their support of agriculture

and have a great time with friends and neighbors," Yount-Woods said.

Ohio Farm Bureau takes on issue of farmland loss

How can farmers communicate to land-use planners and the public the seriousness of maintaining land for agriculture? How do they get involved in creating public policy that preserves farmland?

These were among the issues discussed by more than 100 farmers, farmland preservationists, county and state administrators, and elected officials from across Ohio as they grapple with the growing appetite for land in their state.

To answer questions like these, the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation (OFBF) organized a series of "Neighbor Connection Field Trips" to Ohio farms and other sites.

At each stop, the tour participants

heard from farmers, professors, businesspeople, urban planners and others with differing perspectives on the challenges and opportunities farmers face. In between tour stops, participants listened to a tape or CD produced by the Ohio Farm Bureau that contains interviews with more farmers and land-use planners.

The population of Ohio's small townships and rural areas has grown by about 1 million people over the last 40 years, according to Jeff Sharp, assistant professor of rural sociology at Ohio State University. Ohio's larger cities have lost about 600,000 in population over that same period. That means that Ohioans are increasingly choosing to live in the countryside

outside cities like Cincinnati, Cleveland and Columbus.

With the shift in population to rural areas comes a growing demand for housing and commercial development. Farmers who already own land may be tempted to sell to a developer and get the most money for their investment. Those who want to expand their operations find themselves unable to afford the high land prices. If they aren't able to grow and profit, even more farmland will be gobbled up for development as farmers call it quits.

Numerous farmers spoke about their desire to keep their land as farmland, and how they have used agricultural easements, which Ohio now offers on a limited basis, to lower their tax burden and ensure that their farmland can be passed down to future generations as open space.

Farmland preservationists and land-use planners talked about how land is often zoned to accommodate blocks of houses on small lots that will generate tax revenue for the counties or towns, rather than planning for other important goals like protecting watersheds and preserving farmland. And, farmers talked about the need for public policy that helps them remain viable, so they can help maintain the rural way of life and keep contributing to the state's economy.

Agriculture is Ohio's largest industry. But those who aren't familiar with agriculture and its importance to the state tend to look at open farmland as land that isn't being used for anything, according to Constance Jackson, vice president for agricultural ecology at OFBF. "That's very erroneous," she

said, "because that land is a valuable input into the production of our food and fiber. You have to control enough acreage to have economic viability."

To farmers, a key message of the field trips was: It's up to you to get involved in public policy and local decision-making, make connections with non-farming neighbors and help come up with creative solutions to land-use dilemmas. To local and state officials, the message was: Agriculture is important to Ohio, both economically and sociologically, and its most important input, farmland, must be preserved.

Not only did OFBF use the tape and CD to keep field trip participants thinking about the issue at hand between tour stops, they also plan to use it in the future to reach other administrators and officials who did not take the tour.

"Many of these people aren't looking for another workshop to attend," said Marilyn Baker, director of community alliances for OFBF. "We have to find creative ways of reaching them. This is something we can get out to state and county administrators, elected officials and others and they can listen to it whenever it's convenient for them. We will keep using it as a tool to tell agriculture's story. It's a great way to repeat the message."

Baker said the field trips were a success. "There were a few 'Aha!' moments where officials said they weren't thinking of things the same way they did before," she said. "Everyone got the importance of agriculture and how it contributes to the economy of the state. People are calling us and asking, 'How can I keep going with this?'"

AFBF welcomes new staff member

Betty Wolanyk joined the American Farm Bureau Federation staff March 17 as director of agricultural education. She will develop and implement classroom and consumer education programs, work with state Farm Bureaus to support their Agriculture in the Classroom (AIRC) programs, maintain the AFBF agricultural education Web site, and organize grant applications and fund-raising for the AFB Foundation.

For the last five years, Wolanyk has been running her own business, called Ag Literacy Works, developing agricultural education curricula, conducting teacher workshops, speaking at conferences and writing grant proposals.

Before that, she was national director of the AIRC program at USDA for three and a half years, headed up the AIRC program for New York at Cornell University and was a high school agriculture teacher in the Finger Lakes region of New York. She has a master's degree and a bachelor's degree in education from Cornell.

She is relocating to the Washington, D.C., area from Ithaca, N.Y.



GRASSROOTS

Profit concerns weighing on young farmers, ranchers

For the fifth straight year, America's young farmers and ranchers say the biggest challenge facing them is overall profitability. And, for the sixth consecutive year, young farmers say the best way to address that challenge is to boost U.S. agricultural exports.

Those were among the key findings of a survey of 304 young farmers and ranchers from 41 states, aged 18-35, conducted by the American Farm Bureau Federation, the nation's largest farm organization.

The 11th annual survey of participants in AFBF's Young Farmer and Rancher Program revealed the traditional optimism of younger producers continues to be tempered by economic challenges. But they continue to focus squarely on the future by investing in new technology and business practices to sharpen their competitive edge while protecting the environment.

The informal survey was conducted in February during AFBF's 2003 YF&R Conference in Hershey, Pa.

"Despite the challenges that young farm and ranch families face, overall, this survey shows that the future of American agriculture is in competent, capable and caring hands," said AFBF President Bob Stallman.

RANKING THE CHALLENGES

Reflecting conditions of today's farm economy, nearly a third (31.9 percent) of the young farmers surveyed said overall profitability was their top concern—up slightly from last year's 27.5 percent. The young farmers indicated the limited availability of land and other resources was their second highest challenge, selected by 21.9 percent of respondents—down slightly from last year's 23.7 percent.

Third on this year's list of challenges was the cost of government regulations (13.6 percent, down from 16.8 percent in 2002). Over the survey's 11-year history, profitability has topped the list of concerns eight times and regulations three times.

The fourth biggest challenge on this year's list was urban encroachment on farmland, selected by 9.4 percent of the respondents. Fifth on the list (7 percent) were challenges associated with parental control of farm decisions, followed by health care availability (3.8 percent) and tax burdens (3.1 percent). The availability of water resources and worries about competition from more established farms tied for eighth. Agricultural financing and labor issues rounded out the list.

EXPORTS ARE VITAL

For the sixth straight year, the young farmers viewed international trade as the key to profitability. Respondents

said boosting U.S. agricultural exports was the most important step the U.S. government could take to help them and their farms. At 24.1 percent, that response was a slight decrease from last year's 26.2 percent.

In second place was providing "more financial help for beginning farmers" (14.5 percent). That represents a big jump from last year, when the item placed fifth with just 9.1 percent of the tally.

Strengthening protection for property owners was third at 12.4 percent. Rounding out the top five choices were: reform federal taxes (11.7 percent); and mandate a larger role for renewable, home-grown fuels such as ethanol (7.1 percent).

In spite of the importance of regular and emergency farm program payments to the current economic survival of America's farmers and ranchers, nearly seven of 10 (69.3 percent) said future farm income should come from the marketplace. Just 30.7 percent, down from 47 percent last year, said future farm income should be supplemented to some degree by the farm program. In comparison, 10 years ago nearly 88 percent of the young farmers said farm income should come totally from the marketplace.

TECHNOLOGY USE

Young farmers' and ranchers' use of technology has become commonplace, with 90.5 percent having access to computers at home or on the farm. Internet access among young farmers has leveled off at 78.9 percent, but just five years ago, only 36.2 percent reported having Internet access.

Young farmers and ranchers who use the Internet do so for many reasons. While accessing general and agricultural news was the highest reported use (66.5 percent), many are using the Internet for entertainment (54.3 percent), family education (39.1 percent), record-keeping (34.5 percent), political activity (30.6 percent), and to purchase equipment, supplies and miscellaneous items (30.9 percent).

The use of e-mail showed the largest increase, shooting up to 82.2 percent, a seven-percentage-point increase from last year.

CONSERVATION

Mirroring past surveys, this year's respondents reported a strong commitment to conservation and the use of environmentally beneficial farming practices. More than six out of every 10 (60.9 percent) said they employ conservation tillage on their farms. More than half (53 percent) said they practice crop rotation with three or more crops, and nearly half (47.7 per-

cent) said they regularly test soil or crop tissue before applying nutrients. More than a quarter of respondents (28 percent) said they use integrated pest management techniques such as field scouting to reduce crop protectant use.

Regarding other practices: 26.3 percent use contour farming or strip cropping; 25 percent have land enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program; 18.1 percent leave buffer strips to benefit wildlife; and 16.1 percent managed their wetland resources.

More than 93 percent of the young farmers surveyed said they select farming practices based on both the environment and economics.

More than half of the young farmers (54.5 percent) reported they would plant biotech crop varieties this year, up from 52.2 percent last year. The young farmers' use of global positioning systems, where satellite technology is used to pilot precise field activities, held steady at 15.1 percent.

MANAGING AND MARKETING

This year's survey also revealed that young farmers continue to employ a number of special management and marketing practices and services to gain a competitive edge. The most common was accounting services, used by 42.8 percent of respondents. Second was the use of professional crop advisers, 40.5 percent.

Other management and marketing practices employed were: hedging with futures and options, up slightly at 33.6 percent; engaging in contract production, steady at 29.3 percent; the use of marketing information services, steady at 28 percent; and professional marketing or management consultants, up slightly to 22.7 percent.

INCOME AND IMAGE

To supplement farm income, 69 percent of the young farmers surveyed said that they, their spouse or both work off the farm. That's down slightly from last year's 71.7 percent. Wives were the sole source of off-farm income 63 percent of the time, and husbands were the sole source 8 percent of the time. Both spouses contributed to off-farm income 29 percent of the time.

Of those young farmers reporting off-farm employment, 45.6 percent said the availability of health insurance was the primary reason, up slightly from 45.2 percent last year.

In addition to off-farm employment, 60.2 percent of the respondents said their farm income is supplemented by other farm-related enterprises such as custom work, truck driving, and seed or supply sales.

According to the survey, 46.9 per-

cent of the respondents started farming or ranching as a member of a family partnership, while 22.9 percent started on their own. While 17.7 percent said marriage led them to farm, only 12.5 percent reported that they inherited their farm or ranch.

OPINIONS AND ATTITUDES

When quizzed about their opinions regarding the public's attitude toward farmers and ranchers, 35.9 percent (down from 40.1 percent last year) said they thought the public would weigh in positively, 22.9 percent said the public would respond negatively and 41.2 percent said they thought members of the public generally did not think about them at all.

When asked if they felt better off financially than they were five years ago, 81.4 percent said "yes," down slightly from last year's 83.1 percent. The record high response for that question was 89 percent in 1998, while the lowest was 76 percent in 1994.

Overall optimism this year was up slightly, as 60.8 percent (compared to 59.3 percent last year) said they were more optimistic about farming than they were five years ago. The record high for optimism was 80.8 percent in 1997, while the record low was 52.9 percent in 2000.

A higher percentage of the young farmers and ranchers (94.1 percent) said they planned on being farmers for life. The record high for that question came in 1995 (99.5 percent), while the record low was last year's 91.8 percent.

More of this year's young farmers also said they would like to see their children follow in their footsteps, 88 percent, compared to 84.7 percent last year. The record high for that question came in 1996 (95.5 percent), while the record low was 84.5 percent, recorded in the first YF&R survey back in 1993.

NEWSPAPER HANDLING

FARM BUREAU NEWS