

WASHINGTON REPORT

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Lee Van Wychen

More Compromise Needed on Farm Bill

The Farm Bill is moving, but there is still much to do. The Farm Bill Conference Committee, composed of 47 House members and 9 Senators, held their first meeting on September 5. During that session, all 56 members made 3-minute opening statements that highlighted their top Farm Bill priorities (and concerns). There was general agreement that a bill needs to be passed on time, by September 30, to provide certainty for farmers. However, there are only a handful of legislative working days left in September and there are still significant differences that need to be resolved over the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), conservation funding, and support for farmers.

From a weed science perspective, there are parts of the House bill and parts of the Senate bill that we like to see make it into the final conference agreement. For the House bill, this includes a legislative fix for the duplicative National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) program permits, a Congressional repeal of the 2015 Waters of the United States (WOTUS) rule, legislative guidance to streamline the FIFRA-Endangered Species Act consultation process, and reauthorization of the Pesticide Registration Improvement Act (PRIA). A provision in the Senate bill we'd like to see passed that is not in the House bill is the reauthorization for the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research (FFAR).

Hutchins Nominated as USDA Chief Scientist



Dr. Scott Hutchins, the Global Head of Integrated Field Sciences for Corteva was nominated by the White House on July 16 for the role of USDA Under Secretary for Research, Education and Economics, which is also referred to as USDA's Chief Scientist. If confirmed by the Senate, he will oversee the operations of ARS, NIFA, ERS and NASS. Hutchins has a Ph.D. in entomology from Iowa State University, where he studied the effect of insect-induced injury on alfalfa. Hutchins has bachelor's degree in entomology from Auburn University and a master's degree from Mississippi State University. Presently, he works on pest management chemicals at Corteva and is an adjunct professor at the University of Nebraska. He is a past President of the Entomological Society of America.

Angle Nominated as USDA NIFA Director



The White House nominated Dr. J. Scott Angle to be Director of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) at USDA on August 31. Dr. Angle is currently President and CEO of the International Fertilizer Development Center (IFDC). He worked for 24 years as a professor of soil science and administrator for the Maryland Agricultural Experiment Station and Maryland Cooperative Extension at the University of Maryland. He also served as Dean and Director of the College of Agricultural and

Environmental Sciences at the University of Georgia for 10 years. He is a Fellow at the American Society of Agronomy and the Soil Science Society of America. Dr. Angle earned his Ph.D. in soil microbiology from the University of Missouri.

USDA NIFA, ERS Moving from DC

On August 9, USDA announced that the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and Economic Research Service (ERS) will be moving from D.C. While the new location for the agencies has yet to be determined, the timeframe for the move is expected to occur within the next year where families with children could start the fall 2019 school year at the new location. USDA said it was undertaking the relocations for three main reasons:

- To improve USDA's ability to attract and retain highly qualified staff with training and interests in agriculture, many of whom come from land-grant universities. USDA has experienced significant turnover in these positions, and it has been difficult to recruit employees to the Washington, DC area, particularly given the high cost of living and long commutes.
- To place these important USDA resources closer to many of stakeholders, most of whom live and work far from the Washington, DC area.
- To benefit the American taxpayers. There will be significant savings on employment costs and rent, which will allow more employees to be retained in the long run, even in the face of tightening budgets.

USDA needs a lot of space: About 90,000 square feet for 360 NIFA employees and 70,000 square feet for 260 ERS workers. USDA's criteria for the new spots includes proximity to an airport, commuting options for employees, technology infrastructure, capital and operating costs, community/quality of life and workforce considerations.

USDA's announcement of intent to move the agencies has garnered many concerns from the ag research community, including the WSSA. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue said in a [press release](#) that he would extend by 30 days, to October 15, the deadline for universities and localities to submit an expression of interest (EOI) to house the headquarters of NIFA and ERS. "There has been considerable interest in housing the headquarters of NIFA and ERS, expressed by universities and localities from around the country," stated Perdue. "Some stakeholders have relayed concerns about staff summer vacation schedules interfering with the preparation of proposals, and some have asked for more time to have their plans approved by boards of regents, city councils, or other governing bodies," he added. "An extra 30 days will give everyone time to get organized and will not interfere with our timeline."

The Senate Committee on Agriculture wrote to Secretary Perdue on September 7, raising several questions and requesting more information on the move. The letter, signed by Agriculture Committee Chairman Pat Roberts (R-KS) and Ranking Member Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), noted that stakeholders have expressed concern that relocating the agencies outside of Washington D.C. will lead many employees to leave USDA and cause "a sharp loss of knowledgeable staff."

NIFA Invites Input on Emerging Needs and Opportunities

The USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) is soliciting stakeholder input on the emerging needs and opportunities in food and agricultural sciences through the "NIFA

Listens: Investing in Science to Transform Lives” initiative. The listening sessions are opportunities to provide feedback on these questions:

- In your field, what is the most-needed breakthrough in science/technology that would advance your agricultural enterprise?
- When considering all of agriculture, what is the greatest challenge that should be addressed through NIFA’s research, education, and extension?
- What is your top priority in food and agricultural research, extension, or education that NIFA should address?

Four regional in-person listening sessions will be held:

- Oct. 11, Hartford, Connecticut (RSVP by Oct. 4)
- Oct. 18, New Orleans, Louisiana (RSVP by Oct. 11)
- Oct. 25, Minneapolis, Minnesota (RSVP by Oct. 18)
- Nov. 1, Albuquerque, New Mexico (RSVP by Oct. 25)

The [NIFA Listens website](#) is an information hub that will be used for the sessions. Each session is scheduled to begin at 8:30 a.m. and end no later than 5 p.m. Live webcasts will be available for each session, transcribed, and made available for playback. Session attendees must register via [NIFA Listens](#). In addition, written comments may be provided electronically through the stakeholder input form on the website or emailed to NIFAlistens@nifa.usda.gov until November 30. Feedback is welcome through any of our submission methods and will be gathered throughout the initiative.

National Academies Release Report on the Future of Agriculture Research

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine has released a new report, "[Science Breakthroughs 2030: A Strategy for Food and Agricultural Research](#)," which identifies the innovation needed in the next decade to make the U.S. food and agricultural system more efficient, resilient, and sustainable. Using input from the broad scientific community, the report identifies five scientific breakthrough areas that could have the greatest positive impact on food and agriculture:

- Transdisciplinary Research and Systems Approach
- Sensing Technologies
- Data Science and Agri-Food Informatics
- Genomics and Precision Breeding
- Microbiome

The report also recommends investing in physical and cyber infrastructures, engaging non-agricultural professionals, and recruiting talented individuals into food and agriculture research.

Excellent CAST Issue Paper: “Genome Editing in Agriculture”

On July 9, CAST released its newest publication, [Genome Editing in Agriculture: Methods, Applications, and Governance](#). Science Policy Committee Chair and WSSA-NIFA Fellow Donn Shilling and I attended one of the Washington DC roll out sessions where Dr. Adam Bogdanove from Cornell, lead author and Task Force Chair, gave a great overview on the current status of gene editing, including policy implications. The issue paper describes how genome editing is performed, the types of “edits” that can be made, how the process relates to traditional breeding and conventional genetic engineering, and the potential limitations of the approach.

Hubbard Confirmed to Lead USDA Natural Resources & Environment



On August 28, the Senate confirmed James Hubbard as USDA Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, which oversees the U.S. Forest Service. Hubbard served as deputy chief of USDA Forest Service's State and Private Forestry for 10 years, managing all of the Forest Service's cooperative forestry programs and its fire and aviation division, which accounts for half of the agency's total budget. Prior to serving as a Forest Service deputy chief, Hubbard was the director for the Office of Wildland Fire Coordination at the Interior Department, where he oversaw the implementation of the National Fire Plan he helped develop as a state forester. He also worked for the Colorado Forest Service for a couple decades and served as president of National Association of State Foresters (NASF) in 1990. In 2011, Jim was the recipient of the NASF Lifetime Achievement Award.

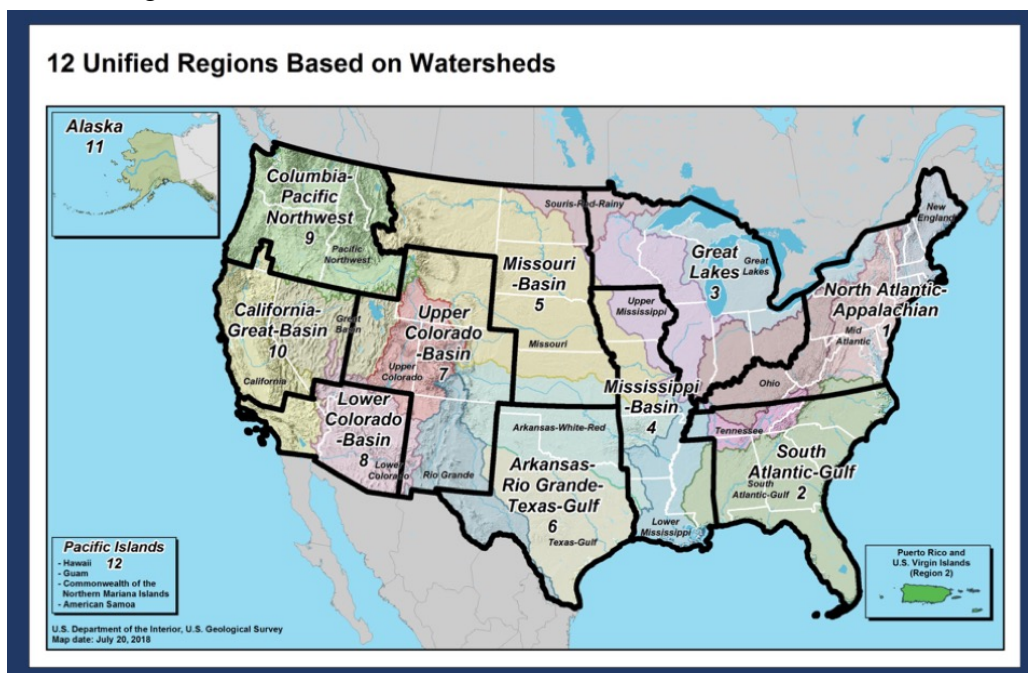
White House Nominates NPS Director



The White House has nominated David Vela to be the Director of the National Park Service (NPS) at the Department of Interior (DOI) on August 31. Mr. Vela has worked at NPS for 28 years and currently serves as the Superintendent of Grand Teton National Park and the John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Memorial Parkway. He has held various park postings within NPS, including at San Antonio Missions National Historical Park, Lyndon B. Johnson National Historical Park, and the George Washington Memorial Parkway. He has also served as Director of the NPS' Southeast Region and Associate Director for Workforce, Relevancy, and Inclusion in the NPS headquarters in Washington, DC. Mr. Vela has a B.S. in recreation and parks from the Texas A&M University.

Interior Rolls Out Reorganization Plan

On August 29, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke announced the Department of the Interior's (DOI) plan to reorganize its bureaus into 12 "unified regions." The proposed management re-design establishes new regional divisions based on the boundaries of states and watersheds (see map).



The proposal has been under development for several months. “Our new Unified Regions will allow important decisions to be made nearer to where our stakeholders and intergovernmental partners live and work, and will make joint problem-solving and improved coordination between our Bureaus and other Federal, State, and local agencies easier,” stated Secretary Zinke.

The 12 unified regions will replace the 49 individual Interior Bureau regional boundaries. Secretary Zinke said that the reorganization will “reduce bureaucratic redundancy, will improve communication between our experts in the field and leaders in Washington, D.C., and will allow us to share our knowledge and resources more effectively.”

Each new region will be managed under a “Regional Leadership Team”, an idea outlined by Susan Combs, acting Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management and Budget for DOI, at a roundtable discussion organized by House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Rob Bishop (R-UT). Combs described Alaska as a model for operations under the reorganization plan. “We started with a pilot in Alaska, because it's one state that has all the bureaus, it already has a legislative framework that requires federal and state agencies to work together,” said Combs. “So, they are working away on inter-bureau collaboration.”

The plan applies to all Interior agencies, except the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians, and the Bureau of Indian Education. Whether these agencies are eventually aligned with the new regional boundaries will be determined after tribal consultation.

APHIS PPQ Changing Plant Inspection Frequency

On September 30, 2018, APHIS’ Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) officials will adjust its inspection procedures and start selecting samples from incoming shipments of live plants based on pest risk. Since 2016, PPQ has been collecting pest interception data on incoming shipments to determine the pest risks associated with country of origin and the type of propagative materials, such as rooted plants, plant cuttings or tissue cultures. Using this data, PPQ will adjust sampling rates at its Plant Inspection Stations to better protect the U.S. against the introduction and spread of damaging plant pests and diseases.

Importers may notice changes in the number of samples selected for inspection at Plant Inspection Stations. For example, PPQ officers may pull fewer samples when inspecting commodities from countries that consistently have few or no pest problems. When inspecting commodities from countries that have more frequent pest problems, officers may pull more samples. When PPQ does not have sufficient risk data about a plant commodity, PPQ officers will sample at the highest rate until they collect enough data to make a statistically sound decision about its risk level.

New Cover Crops and Water Quality Fact Sheets Available

In a review of 98 publications, staff from USDA’s Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (SARE) program and the University of Missouri identified how cover cropping influences soil and nutrient losses from agricultural fields, water infiltration, and soil organic matter. [Cover Crops and Water Quality](#) resources include five fact sheets, three infographics and

a PowerPoint presentation template that can be downloaded and used for outreach and educational purposes.

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Meetings of the National and Regional Weed Science Societies

Dec. 3 - 6, 2018 North Central Weed Science Society (NCWSS), Milwaukee, WI www.ncwss.org

Jan. 7 - 10, 2019 Northeastern Weed Science Society (NEWSS), Baltimore, MD www.newss.org

Feb. 3 - 7, 2019 Southern Weed Science Society (SWSS), Oklahoma City, OK www.swss.ws

Feb. 11 - 14, 2019 Weed Science Society of America (WSSA), New Orleans, LA www.wssa.net

Mar. 11 - 14, 2019 Western Society of Weed Science (WSWS), Denver, CO www.wsweedsociety.org

Jul. 14 - 17, 2019 Aquatic Plant Management Society (APMS), San Diego, CA www.apms.org