WASHINGTON REPORT
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Lee Van Wychen

2020 Weed Science Policy Fellows: Camp Hand and Vasiliy Lakoba

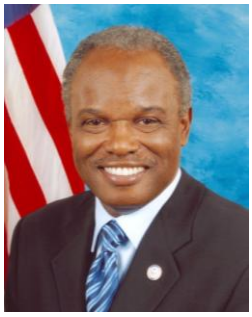
The Weed Science Policy Fellowship program is a unique opportunity for graduate students to assist me in my role as Executive Director of Science Policy for WSSA while gaining experience dealing with a broad array of weed science policy issues. This year's Science Policy Fellows are **Lavesta "Camp" Hand** at the University of Georgia and **Vasiliy Lakoba** at Virginia Tech.

Camp is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Georgia under the direction of Dr. Stanley Culpepper. Camp received a B.S. and M.S. in Horticulture from Auburn University, and is passionate about weed management in vegetable systems, which led him to Dr. Culpepper's program. Through his studies, Camp became extremely passionate about doing work that was unbiased and based on grower needs. Currently his research focuses on determining the possibility of using 2,4-D or dicamba as preplant burndown herbicides over plastic mulch prior to vegetable transplanting, quantifying the reduction in selection pressure associated with the utilization of cover crops, residual herbicides, and layby applications in cotton, and cereal rye response to commonly used wheat herbicides for improved weed control in rye produced for grain. Camp is interested in policy because he has seen the positive impact that Dr. Culpepper's involvement in policy has made on Georgia agriculture. Camp wants to help producers in a similar way, and having exposure to policy through this fellowship will allow him to do that, wherever he ends up.

Vasiliy is a fourth year PhD candidate at Virginia Tech working on invasive plant ecology with Dr. Jacob Barney. His primary research is on local adaptation to climate and stress across the agricultural and non-agricultural ecotypes of johnsongrass. At Virginia Tech, he is an Interfaces of Global Change Fellow, pursuing additional research into noxious weed policy, as well as freshwater salinization. Prior to this, he worked on forest understory restoration while completing an M.S. at Penn State. Vasiliy is interested in how invasive species policy can be informed by bolstering communication channels between researchers, land managers, industry, advocates, government agencies, and other stakeholders.

Major Changes in the House Ag Committee

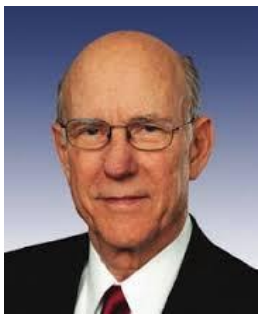
There will be a significant transition in leadership for the House Ag Committee as Chair Collin Peterson (D-MN) lost his re-election bid after a 30 year tenure in the House. He has served as either chair or ranking member of the House Ag Committee since 2005. In addition, House Ag Committee Ranking Member, Rep. Mike Conway (R-TX) is retiring this year after 16 years in Congress. He also served as Chair of the committee from 2015-2019.



On December 3, **Rep. David Scott (D-GA)** was approved by the House Democratic Caucus to serve as the next House Ag Committee Chair for the 117th Congress. Their primary task will be preparation of the next Farm Bill, due in 2023. Scott was elected to Congress in 2003 and has served on the House Ag Committee during the entire time. "I am honored to have been chosen by my colleagues in the Democratic Caucus to serve as Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee," said Scott. "I was born on my grandparents' farm in rural Aynor, South Carolina, during the days of segregation, and the hardships, of those, on whose shoulders I now stand. I owe this historic selection as the first African American Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee to a diverse coalition of members from across our nation. And I will use this critical opportunity to represent the values of our entire caucus and advance our priorities for trade, disaster aid, climate change, sustainable agriculture, SNAP, crop insurance, small family farms, specialty crops, and rural broadband. The fault lines dividing our rural and urban communities are running deep, and climate change is now threatening our nation's food supply. As Chairman, I will lead the fight to rise up and meet these challenges."

House Republicans approved **Rep. Glenn "GT" Thompson (R-PA)** as the House Ag Committee's Ranking Member. "The challenges ahead of us are considerable, but we will continue to put farm families first and ensure our country has the most safe and affordable food supply chain on the planet," said Thompson. He was first elected to Congress in 2008 and comes from a family of dairy farmers, and has lived in rural Pennsylvania his whole life. The 117th Session of Congress begins on Jan. 3, 2021. The full list of House Democratic Committee Chairs are here. The full list of House Republican Committee Ranking Members are here.

Senate Ag Committee Chair Roberts Retires



On the Senate side, Senate Ag Committee Chairman **Sen. Pat Roberts (R-KS)** is retiring after 40 years in Congress. He spent 16 years in the House and 24 years in the Senate. He is the only member in the history of Congress to chair both the House and Senate Ag Committees. Senate Ag Committee Ranking Member Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) is the only one of the four Ag Committee leaders in the House and Senate who will be returning for the 117th Congress. She is in her 4th Senate term and served as Chair of the Senate Ag Committee from 2011-2015. She likely will remain the top Democrat on the Senate Ag Committee, while Arkansas Sen. John Boozman is the lead candidate to take over the GOP side, likely as chair, if Republicans maintain the hold on the Senate.

In what was likely one of his last acts before his retirement, Sen. Roberts presided over a Senate Ag Committee hearing on agricultural research and food security on Dec. 2. During the hearing, many committee members -- as well as the witnesses -- praised Roberts' tenure on the House and Senate agriculture committees.

In his opening remarks, Sen. Roberts noted that, in fiscal year 1981, "When I began my service in the House, $1.4 billion in public funding was provided for U.S. agriculture research. By 2015, that annual investment more than tripled to more than $4.5 billion. Even more impressive, private sector investment in food and agriculture research rose over 660% over that same period -- from $1.6 billion to more than $12 billion per year." Roberts added, "There is still a great deal to do. We must take a fresh look at what agricultural security means in terms of the defense of the agriculture sector and our food supply."

Vilsack to Return as USDA Secretary

On December 8, the Biden administration announced they were nominating Tom Vilsack to lead USDA as the 32nd U.S. Secretary of Agriculture. Vilsack is currently the CEO of the U.S. Dairy Export Council and served through both terms of the Obama Administration as the 30th Secretary of Agriculture from 2009 to 2017. Prior to that, he served as governor of Iowa from 1999 to 2007. Vilsack would be the first USDA Secretary to serve in two different administrations nonconsecutively. His fellow Iowan James "Tama Jim" Wilson served as Secretary of Agriculture for 16 years from 1897 to 1913 during three consecutive presidencies and holds the record as the longest-serving U.S. Cabinet member.

Vilsack was born in an orphanage in Pittsburgh, PA and went on to earn his bachelor's degree at Hamilton College in Clinton, NY and his J.D. from Albany Law School. Vilsack and his wife Christie moved to Mount Pleasant, IA in 1975, where he joined his father-in-law's law practice. He became mayor of Mount Pleasant in 1987 and then was elected to the Iowa Senate in 1992 before becoming governor of Iowa in 1999.

FY 2021 Appropriations Update

While lawmakers have agreed to spending limits for the 12 appropriations bills, they had to pass a last minute Continuing Resolution (CR) on Dec. 11 to keep the government funded at FY 2020 levels **until Dec. 18.** This averted a shutdown and giving congressional negotiators more time to haggle over pandemic relief and a $1.4 trillion omnibus spending package for FY 2021, which began on Oct. 1st. Here is a look at FY 2021 proposed spending levels for various weed and aquatic plant management research programs compared to FY 2019 and FY 2020:

	FY19 Final	**FY20 Final**		**FY21 President**	**FY21 House**	**FY21 Senate**	**FY21 Final**
	----------Millions ----------						
USDA-ARS	$1,303	$1,414		$1,368	$1,452	$1,510	?
USDA-NIFA	$1,471	$1,527		$1,591	$1,574	$1,539	?
-AFRI Competitive Grants	$415	$425		$600	$435	$435	?

-Hatch Act (Exp. stations)	$259	$259		$243	$259	$259	?
-Smith Lever (Extension)	$315	$315		$299	$315	$315	?
-IR-4 Program	$12	$12		$17	$15	$12	?
-Crop Protection and Pest Management (CPPM)	$20	$20		$20	$20	$20	?
Army Corp- Aquatic Plant Control research	$6	$6		$0	$2	$7	?
Army Corp- Watercraft Inspection Stations	$6	$18		$0	$18	$13	?
EPA - Great Lakes Restoration Initiative	$300	$320		$320	$335	$320	?
NOAA – Sea Grant Program	$68	$74		$0	$71	$76	?
Note- For FY 2021, both the House and Senate bills provide **$3 million to USDA-APHIS** to partner with State departments of agriculture and forestry commissions in States considered to be the epicenter of **cogongrass** infestations to assist with its control and treatment.							

Strong Demand for College Grads with Agriculture Degrees

A new report, released by USDA-NIFA and Purdue University, shows a strong job demand for new college graduates with degrees in agricultural programs. U.S. college graduates can expect approximately 59,400 job opportunities annually between 2020 and 2025. This reflects a 2.6 percent growth from the previous five years. **Employer demand will exceed the supply of available graduates** with a bachelor's degree or higher in agriculture-related fields. Read the full report.

New CAST Issue Paper: "Ground and Aerial Robots for Agricultural Production: Opportunities and Challenges"

The Council for Agricultural Science and Technology (CAST) issue paper is now available for free download. The paper discusses ground and aerial robots; robotic manipulators; robots used for row crops, orchards, and specialty crops; automated systems in animal agriculture; and enabling factors for the deployment and adoption of robots.

EPA Finalizes Application Exclusion Zone Requirements

In January, the National and Regional Weed Science Societies submitted comments on EPA's proposed Application Exclusion Zone (AEZ) regulation revisions. We are pleased that EPA adopted most of those revisions when they released their final AEZ requirements in October 29, 2020. The AEZ is the area surrounding pesticide application equipment that exists during outdoor pesticide applications. Below are some of the improvements made:

- AEZ requirements only apply within the boundaries of the agricultural establishment, removing off-farm responsibilities that were difficult for state regulators to enforce.
- Immediate family members of farm owners are now exempted from all aspects of the AEZ requirements. Farm owners and their family are now able to shelter in place inside closed buildings, giving them flexibility to decide whether to stay on-site.
- New clarifying language has been added so that applications that are suspended due to individuals entering an AEZ may be resumed after those individuals have left the AEZ.
- Simplified criteria to determine whether applications are subject to the 25- or 100-foot AEZ.

EPA Proposes Interim Registration Decision for Paraquat

EPA issued a proposed interim decision (PID) for paraquat on October 22, 2020. WSSA has previously submitted comments on EPA's draft human health and ecological risk assessments for paraquat in 2016 and 2019. The proposed interim decision contains the following measures:

- Prohibiting aerial application for all uses and use sites except cotton desiccation;
- Prohibiting pressurized handgun and backpack sprayer application methods on the label;
    - **NOTE**: The cancellation of backpack sprayers and mechanically pressurized handguns does not have an impact on the experimental use of paraquat under an Experimental Use Permit or the 40 CFR 172.3(b) exemption. Labels for unregistered products distributed solely for experimental use and research purposes do not need EPA approval and can differ from registered products as appropriate for the experimental use. **Thus, if an unregistered paraquat product is being used for research purposes, it can be applied by backpack sprayer or mechanically pressurized handgun.**
- Limiting the maximum application rate for alfalfa to one pound a.i./ac;
- Requiring enclosed cabs if area treated in 24-hr period is more than 80 acres;
- Requiring enclosed cabs or PF10 respirators if area treated in 24-hr period is 80 acres or less;
- Requiring a residential area drift buffer and 7-day restricted entry interval (REI) for cotton desiccation;
- Requiring a 48-hour REI for all crops and uses except cotton desiccation
- Adding mandatory spray drift management label language.
- More permissive: Truck drivers who are not certified applicators can transport previously opened paraquat containers.
- Comments on EPA's proposed interim decision are due Jan. 11, 2021.

Triazines Begin Endangered Species Act Consultation Review Process

On Nov. 5, 2020, EPA released its draft biological evaluations for atrazine, simazine and propazine for review and comment. Biological evaluations (BEs) are the beginning of EPA's Endangered Species Act consultation review process for pesticides where they determine if an endangered or threatened species or critical habitat could be affected by the use of that pesticide. These are the **first herbicides** to go through EPA's Revised Method for Species Biological Evaluations of Conventional Pesticides. Glyphosate will be second (see next story).

The BEs make effects determinations for 1,795 endangered or threatened species and 792 designated critical habitats. EPA's draft BEs for the triazines predict that:

- Atrazine is likely to adversely affect 54 percent of all species and 40 percent of critical habitats;
- Propazine is likely to adversely affect 4 percent of all species and 2 percent of critical habitats; and
- Simazine is likely to adversely affect approximately 53 percent of species and 40 percent of critical habitats.

Comments on the draft BEs for the triazines are due on January 5, 2021. WSSA has requested an extension. After considering the public comments and any additional data, EPA will finalize the BEs. If the EPA determines a pesticide may affect a listed species or its critical habitat, it will consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service (the Services) as appropriate. The Services will then issue a biological opinion to determine if the population of a species would be adversely impacted and, if so, propose ways to reduce risks.

EPA Releases Draft Biological Evaluations for Glyphosate

Not far behind the triazines, EPA issued its draft biological evaluations for glyphosate on November 27, 2020. EPA predicted that glyphosate is likely to adversely affect 93% of the endangered or threatened species, with plants accounting for more than half of them. EPA also concluded that 96% of the critical habitats it considered could be at risk from glyphosate as well. Comments on the draft BEs for glyphosate are due Jan. 26, 2021. WSSA will likely request an extension of this comment period.

National Academy of Sciences (NAS) Webinar on the Future of Sustainable Agrochemistry

This intriguing webinar was hosted by the Chemical Sciences Roundtable of NAS on November 12th and examined the current landscape of agrochemistry and discussed methods and technologies to sustain crop production into the future using chemistry. Speakers included: Dr. Peter Eckes, BASF Bioscience Research; Dr. George Frisvold, The University of Arizona; and Dr. Tejas K. Shah, Corteva Agriscience. The webinar recording is available here.

Comments on Interior's Draft Invasive Species Plan

The National and Regional Weed Science Societies submitted comments on the Department of the Interior's (DOI) efforts to develop a comprehensive Invasive Species Strategic Plan. Invasive weeds in terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems are estimated to cost nearly $30 billion per year.

Our main concern is that DOI invasive species efforts are extremely underfunded. In FY 2020, DOI estimated it spent $143 million to manage invasive species on over 400 million acres of DOI's public lands. That's roughly 35 cents per acre for invasive species prevention, early detection and rapid response (EDRR), monitoring, restoration, research and public awareness, while the USDA is spending over $9 per acre annually. It will be impossible to implement DOI's Plan with only 35 cents per acre of funding per year. Many weed management strategies alone can cost in the $10's to $100's per acre per year. We realize the Congress is also involved in the federal appropriations process, but DOI can lead the way with increased budget requests.

We also support the increased focus on invasion pathways and vectors. Effective management of invasive species at a national scale will need a systemic and science-based prioritization. As the Plan reiterates the importance of cost-efficiency in this venture, it should be noted that much more return on investment may be had by minimizing an introduction pathway than by eradicating a single invader whose place may be subsequently taken by another invader.

Conservation Enhancement Act Signed Into Law

America's Conservation Enhancement (ACE) Act was signed into law (Public Law No: 116-188) on October 30. The new law contained eight bills that were introduced in either the House or the Senate or both that reauthorized a number of key conservation programs important for invasive species management as well as created new authorization for a chronic wasting disease (CWD) task force and for national fish habitat partnerships. The legislation, led by Senate Environment and Public Works Committee chair Sen. John Barrasso (R-WY) and ranking member Sen. Tom Carper (D-DE), had strong support across the conservation community and marks one more success for conservation legislation enacted during the 116th Congress.

Among its provisions, the ACE Act:

- Reauthorizes the North American Wetlands Conservation Act at up to $60 million per year through 2025
- Reauthorizes the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) through 2025 at $15 million per year for Interior, $5 million per year for USDA and $5 million per year for Commerce
- Authorizes funds to combat the threat of invasive species through the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act with up to $2.5 million per year through 2025 for both Interior and the Army Corp of Engineers
- Reauthorizes the Chesapeake Bay Program through 2025

2020 Survey Results of Common and Troublesome Weeds Now Available

The 2020 survey results for weeds in grass crops, pastures & turf are posted at http://wssa.net/wssa/weed/surveys/. **Weeds barely mentioned in 2017 that increased in 2020** include medusahead, ventenata, dogfennel, Scotch thistle, vaseygrass, Lehmann lovegrass, milkweed spp., and *Lepidium spp*.

- Top 3 most **common** weeds in **all** grass crops: 1) pigweed spp., 2) foxtail spp., and 3) crabgrass spp.
- Top 3 most **troublesome** weeds in **all** grass crops: 1) pigweed spp., 2) Cirsium/Carduus spp., and 3) bluegrass spp.

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