



TAD News

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Congress debating 2 laws important to dairies

This month I want to focus on two very important federal legislative initiatives, immigration reform and CERCLA. As Congress reconvenes after its Easter break, many dairymen, including TAD representatives, have contacted their congressmen and senators to express concerns over these two very different but very important issues facing our industry.

Manager's Update

John Cowan

I urge you to also call or email your congressman or senators to make your voice heard.

TAD supports three basic concepts concerning immigration reform: allow access to workers; provide a procedure for workers to gain legal status; and do not require dairymen to police the program. Whether or not these concepts are included in the final decision could depend on how many of us get involved!

Several ideas are being circulated, from amnesty to a modified guest worker program to erecting a fence along the state's southern border. The facts remain – you must get your ideas heard by your elected officials! With CERCLA, activists believe dairies should be treated the same as a large industrial manufacturing company, such as Dow Chemical or Exxon. TAD supports, as do many agricultural organizations across the country, that Congress did not intend to include manure under CERCLA or ERCRA.

Correctly used animal nutrients for crop growth has been the gold standard for hundreds of years. Today, it still remains the most efficient use.

U.S. Rep. Ralph Hall of Texas filed HR 4341 that would clarify the intent of Congress. Please contact your elected officials and ask them to vote for HR 4341.

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Fisher wins top county ag honors

Bryant Fisher, a Hopkins County dairyman, was honored by the Hopkins County Chamber of Commerce as the "Agriculturist of the Year" at its annual membership banquet. He was accompanied by his wife, Marilee, and son, Blake (pictured above). The award was presented by the Professional Ag Workers Committee.

Fisher was recognized for his continuing work for the dairy
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Texas House passes tax revamp

The Texas House in the wee hours of Tuesday passed four of the five bills associated with the tax plan put forward by Gov. Rick Perry and the Texas Tax Commission that is designed to cut school property taxes by about one-third. The fifth bill, which will raise the cigarette tax, had some technical troubles, but should have been on the House calendar Thursday.

Now it's on to the Texas Senate, which could take up the bills later in the week.

Among the provisions passed by the House:

- A new business tax which would raise about \$3.5 billion a year and replace the corporate franchise tax with a levy based on gross receipts (approved on a bipartisan 80-69 vote).
- An 11 percent property tax cut (approved 139-5), augmented by spending \$2 billion of the state's \$8.2 billion surplus.
- A sales tax on at least 80 percent of the blue book value of used cars.

The Legislature is under orders from the Texas Supreme Court to pass a new school finance plan by June 1, or state money for schools will be cut off. ■

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Today, the federal Clean Water Act and Clean Air Act, along with extensive state environmental laws and regulations apply to agriculture. Passage of HR 4341 would strengthen current federal and state environmental laws and regulations. ▪

Sunset agency looks at TAHC

As this newsletter went to press, the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission was set to hold a public hearing on the Texas Animal Health Commission on May 2-3 in Austin.

Sunset is the regular assessment by the Legislature of the continuing need for a state agency to exist. While most oversight is concerned with agency compliance with legislative policies, Sunset asks a more basic question: Do the agency's functions continue to be needed? The Sunset process works by setting a date on which an agency will be abolished unless legislation is passed to continue its functions. This creates a unique opportunity for the Legislature to look closely at each agency and make fundamental changes to an agency's mission or operations if needed.

The Commission staff's report can be viewed at www.sunset.state.tx.us under “Publications.”

The Commission will vote on recommendations concerning the TAHC at a later meeting. ▪

Congress starts dairy caucus

U.S. Rep. Rick Larsen of Washington has formed the first-ever Congressional Dairy Farmer Caucus, a bipartisan group of lawmakers who will represent dairy producing regions across the country. The new caucus will focus on developing and promoting policy issues that are in the best interest of a healthy national dairy industry.

The caucus will help congressmen work together to address emerging issues of importance to dairy producers and consumers, a goal that will be particularly important as Congress begins to write the next Farm Bill.

Caucus co-chairmen – none of whom are from Texas – are recruiting other House and Senate members to join the caucus. ▪



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Animal ID program slows in Texas, moves forward on federal level

While the U.S. Department of Agriculture is moving forward with an animal ID program, the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) has put its program on hold.

In early April, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns announced the release of an implementation plan that outlines timelines and benchmarks for the establishment of the National Animal Identification System (NAIS), along with a plan for the initial integration of private and state animal tracking databases with NAIS.

The USDA plans for NAIS to be operational by 2007 and fully implemented by 2009, with full producer participation by that date. More than 235,000 premises are currently registered nationwide.

The NAIS implementation plan, along with more information about the program, is available at www.usda.gov/nais.

Meanwhile, TAHC has put proposed premises registration regulations on "hold." Originally set for discussion at the Commission's May meeting, it now won't be considered until the winter or spring of 2007.

TAHC will continue to promote voluntary, free registration of sites (premises) where livestock and fowl are held, handled or managed. More than 10,000 premises have been registered in Texas.

Information sheets about premises registration, NAIS booklets, or presentations about premises registration may be requested by contacting the nearest TAHC area office or TAHC headquarters. ▪

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industry. He has served as president of the Texas Dairy Herd Improvement Program, advisory board member for the Dairy Records Management System, Southeastern Area Council representative for Dairy Farmers of America and board member of Texas Association of Dairymen. He also served as dairy superintendent for the Northeast Texas Livestock Association for 10 years. ▪