



# NATIONAL GRANGE OF THE ORDER OF PATRONS OF HUSBANDRY

*American Values. Hometown Roots.*

*View from the Hill*



## **POLICY UPDATES and ISSUE NEWS APRIL 2024 WRAP-UP**

### **AGRICULTURE AND FOOD**

#### **Farm bill could see action soon**

House Ag Committee Chairman G.T. Thompson has announced he plans to unveil a draft of the farm bill and begin markup in the committee before Memorial Day. He says he's found a way to robustly fund the safety net programs including commodity programs and crop insurance. He also assured Democrats on the committee that no money would be shifted to the commodities program from the nutrition title or the Inflation Reduction Act conservation funding, both items that Democrats have insisted on protecting.

#### **U.S. commodities to emergency food aid**

USDA and the Agency for International Development will deploy \$1 billion in Commodity Credit Corporation funding to purchase U.S. grown commodities for emergency food assistance for people around the world in need. USDA will purchase the commodities and transfer them to USAID for distribution. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, an estimated 205 million people need life-saving food assistance worldwide.

#### **More veggies, less milk**

USDA's final changes to the Women, Infants and Children nutrition assistance program (WIC) will boost fruit and vegetable consumption among participants while trimming milk and dairy they purchase with benefits. The changes permanently increase the fruit and vegetable benefit Congress first approved in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The final rule includes cuts to the amount of milk and dairy products available to purchase through the program.

#### **Ranchers fear loss of public lands use**

The Bureau of Land Management has finalized a rule that will allow conservation leases on the 245 million acres of mostly western land the agency controls. These lands have traditionally been managed on the multiple use concept where they are eligible for lease to livestock grazing, recreation, energy development and timber harvest. Ranchers and other current lease-holders fear that well-funded public interest groups will be able to out-bid them for leases on these lands.

### **CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENT**

#### **President invests in climate-smart agriculture**

President Biden has made \$1.5 billion available for fiscal year 2024 for conservation and climate solutions through USDA's Regional Conservation Partnership program. The RCP invests in landowner partner-driven projects that help

farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners adopt and expand conservation strategies to enhance natural resources and climate-smart practices. The move was welcomed by ag producers. But several key progressives on Capitol Hill are critical of such practices alleging they are less targeted to reducing greenhouse gas emissions than subsidizing the country's largest "factory" farms.

### **Ag climate alliance engages EPA**

The National Grange is a member of the Food and Agriculture Climate Alliance that has been able to bring agriculture to the table during EPA's consideration of what types of projects could qualify for new program funding at EPA. EPA has recently established a \$14 billion National Clean Investment fund to mitigate climate change and build resilience to challenging growing conditions.

### **Ag emissions down**

Agriculture emissions fall to their lowest level in ten years according to the EPA. Emissions from all agriculture are just under 10% of the U.S. total which is the lowest level since 2012. This highlights the value of voluntary and market-based programs that support producer efforts in sustainable agriculture practices.

## **HEALTH CARE**

### **Funding urged for Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network**

The National Grange, the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, the Farmers Union and a broad group of agriculture, rural, and mental health organizations are urging the Senate and House Appropriations Committees to continue the \$10 million funding for FRSAN during FY 2025. Administered by USDA, FRSAN established four regional centers that include telephone helplines and websites, training programs and workshops, support groups, and outreach services. The National Grange and Rural Minds are pushing for additional permanent funding in the farm bill.

### **Rise in rural fatal drug overdoses concerning**

The rise in fatal drug overdoses has been rising more rapidly in rural areas for the past decade. While the rate of deaths are generally higher in urban areas, eight states – California, Connecticut, Maryland, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Vermont and Virginia – had higher drug overdose death rates in rural areas. Even though the federal government has allocated billions to all 50 states, observers question sending additional funding to places that are already well funded. For instance, in a recent round of funding grants, half went to California and New York.

### **Medicare should cover anti-obesity medications**

The National Grange and 42 medical, patient and consumer groups signed a letter to the administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicare Services to request CMS approve Medicare coverage of anti-obesity medication treatment for all people with obesity. Obesity is a significant contributing factor to the development of cardiovascular disease and several others.

### **Plant-based meat isn't better for your heart**

Findings published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* seems to debunk plant-based meat analogue product claims that they are healthier for your diet than real meat. Researchers found no significant changes in cholesterol profiles for either diet.

## TAXES

### Senate urged to pass tax relief

The National Grange and 33 agriculture producer organizations sent a letter to Senate Majority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McConnell to urging them to bring H.R. 7024 to the floor for a vote. The bill, Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act, passed the House with broad bipartisan support. It would extend expired or soon-to-expire provisions of the tax code for farmers, ranchers, growers and landowners. These include bonus depreciation, Section 1031 like-kind exchanges, pass-through provisions and several more.

## TELECOMMUNICATIONS

### Support grows to extend Affordable Connectivity Program

The ACP provides more than 33 million low-income households with a monthly internet discount. Its \$14 billion allocation from the Infrastructure and Jobs Act will run dry in May. The ACP Extension Act introduced in January would provide funding through 2024 while permanent funding sources can be negotiated. The Act has 223 cosponsors in the House but it has yet to be brought to the floor. The Biden Administration is urging Congress to pass the legislation. A discharge petition is currently being circulated in the House that, if sufficient signatures are obtained, would force a vote on the ACP Extension Act.

## PERSPECTIVE

“ *If I can stop one heart from breaking, I shall not live in vain.* ~ **Emily Dickenson** ”

“ *There never was any heart truly great and generous, that was not also tender and compassionate.* ~ **Robert Frost** ”

“ *The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched, they must be felt in the heart.* ~ **Helen Keller** ”

“ *I think there is only one quality worse than hardness of heart and that is softness of head.* ~ **Theodore Roosevelt** ”

“ *The heart of a fool is in his mouth, but the mouth of a wise man is in his heart.* ~ **Benjamin Franklin** ”