

Our View: 649,355 Reasons to Write a New Farm Bill

Friday, February 24, 2017

From Farm Policy Facts

If we needed a reason for why a strong farm bill must be reauthorized without delay then this week provided one. Actually, this week provided 649,355 reasons. That's the number of student members of the National FFA who celebrated American agriculture, agricultural education, and a future in farming this week.

In the midst of a down farm economy, depressed prices, predatory practices with our trading partners and a whole host of other challenges, these FFA members, who range in age from 12 to 21, are not only hopeful about the future of agriculture, but are actively telling the public about its importance. "Purpose to Action" is this year's tagline and the organization's national officers are ahead of the game in pushing Congress to pass the piece of legislation that is critical for their future: the farm bill.

Just last week, these young leaders stormed the halls of Congress and the Administration to meet with policymakers and explain the importance of farm policy. These are some of the young people who want to continue the family farming tradition or want to work in the agricultural sector in some capacity. It was not lost on them that federal policy could make or break that opportunity.

"It's important to note that while the average age of the American farmer continues to creep upwards, the National FFA is enjoying a record number of members in the history of its existence. As the new CEO of the organization, Mark Poeschl, recently noted, this growth in membership "reflects a continued enthusiasm for agriculture." He added that the organization "is preparing our members for careers in agriculture and is working to ensure the security of our country's food, fiber and natural resources systems for years to come."

But, as statistics demonstrate, at some point the enthusiasm for agriculture starts to wane for young people and no doubt today's headlines do not offer much inspiration. A recent story in The Wall Street Journal may explain the disparity between the average age of America's farmers and the high enrollment of the National FFA. The story described in great detail today's economic woes in farm country that may cause many farmers to get out of the business altogether with not much incentive for young people to fill the void or continue a multi-generational farm.

That's where strong, sound farm policy comes into play. That's why reauthorizing a new farm bill without delay is necessary. The chairmen of the agriculture committees in Congress have said they are committed to getting one done on time and already they have begun hearings to kick off the process.

But, they will need all of us in the agricultural community working together to help make it happen. The farm bill reauthorization process always provides its fair share of challenges, but for those of us who work on this effort on behalf

of the men and women who grow our food and fiber, let us take heart from the enthusiasm of FFA members whose motto is "we believe in the future of agriculture."

The future of farming and other agricultural opportunities rests on our continued investment in it. Young people are counting on us. Let's not let them down.

Enrollment Opens for Texas International Cotton School

Friday, Feb. 24, 2017 From Texas International Cotton School

Registration is open for the 37th session of the Texas International Cotton School, scheduled for August 7-17, 2017, in Lubbock.

The Texas International Cotton School (TICS) is uniquely structured to provide an integrated understanding of the Texas cotton industry and how it interacts with the global cotton/textile complex. The intensive two-week program covers all aspects of cotton, from the field to the fabric. Since its inception, the school has been a collaboration between the Texas cotton merchants who make up the Lubbock Cotton Exchange and the faculty and staff of the Fiber and Biopolymer Research Institute of Texas Tech University.

"Our planning committee works diligently to ensure that our curriculum not only includes the fundamentals of the cotton industry, but also examines the latest issues and advancements," Lubbock Cotton Exchange President Darren Newton said.

Jayci Cave, TICS graduate and communications manager at Plains Cotton Cooperative Association, said attending the Texas International Cotton School was an "incredible experience."

"It gives you an overview of everything from the farmer all the way to the finished textile product," she said. "I would recommend anyone with an interest in cotton to attend."

During the two weeks of the school, more than 30 experts from across the United States teach the students, who learn about the cotton marketing chain – including seed breeding, farm production, harvesting, ginning, warehousing, merchandising, and textile manufacturing. All aspects of U.S. and global trade of cotton are covered, so the students obtain an understanding of what is required to successfully participate in the U.S. cotton market and to deliver the cottons needed in diverse export markets. They learn about the important quality attributes of cotton fibers and how these translate into processing efficiency and textile product quality. Throughout the program, students have repeated opportunities to interact with the cotton merchants of the Lubbock Cotton Exchange and the fiber and textile experts of Texas Tech University.

"My favorite part of the cotton school was getting to meet people from all sectors of the cotton industry," Cave said. "From the speakers to my fellow attendees, I learned something from everyone I met!"

For more information, including tuition and curriculum, visit <http://www.texasintl cottonschool.com> or call Christi Chadwell, TICS coordinator, at (806) 834-8124.