

Farm Bill Sails Through House, Senate

Friday, December 14, 2018

By Mary Jane Buerkle

The culmination of years of work and strategy to develop and pass a new policy package for agriculture came on Tuesday and Wednesday as Congress acted swiftly to approve H.R. 2, the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018, following Monday's release of the final Farm Bill Conference Report.

The bill easily cleared the Senate on Tuesday afternoon by a vote of 87-13. On Wednesday, the bill passed in the House of Representatives by a vote of 369-47, the largest margin of victory on record.

The 2018 Farm Bill's next stop is President Trump's desk, where he has indicated he will sign the bill into law. Although it is not known at press time when that will happen, some experts have speculated it will be one day next week.

"This Farm Bill contains many of cotton's top priorities, and provisions that will benefit farmers across the nation," PCG President Stacy Smith said. "We look forward to President Trump signing it into law so we can have this vital legislation in place as soon as possible."

A few highlights of the bill that will positively impact growers are as follows:

- Beginning with the 2021 crop year, growers will be able to choose each year between Agricultural Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) on a crop-by-crop and farm-by-farm basis, allowing for additional flexibility.
- An "escalator provision" allows for PLC Reference Prices to adjust if the five-year Olympic average price increases significantly.
- The definition of a "family farm" has been expanded within Actively Engaged in Farming regulations to include nieces, nephews, and first cousins, which allows for continuation of lineal descent among farming operations.
- Landowners/growers will have a one-time opportunity to update payment yields for PLC, based on 2013-2017 history, on a covered commodity by covered commodity basis.
- Crop insurance is protected and maintained, with modest enhancements to the program.
- Conservation Reserve Program acres are expanded, and Environmental Quality Incentives Program funding is increased.

More information about the bill, including full text and a summary, is at <https://agriculture.house.gov/farmbill/>.

PCG recognizes the steadfast, tireless efforts of House Agriculture Committee Chairman Mike Conaway, Ranking Member Collin Peterson, Senate Ag Committee Chairman Pat Roberts, Ranking Member Debbie Stabenow and all members and

staff of both committees, including U.S. Rep. Jodey Arrington of Lubbock, for working diligently to complete the bill. PCG thanks every Senator and Representative who voted in support of the bill, including Senator John Cornyn, Senator Ted Cruz, and PCG-area representative Mac Thornberry.

"I am proud of the work we have done to fight for the hard-working farm and ranch families who feed and clothe this nation, to fight for better policy that strengthens the farm safety net and our rural communities, improves conservation initiatives, expands exports, and enhances the integrity of our nutrition programs," Chairman Conaway said in a news release after the House's passage of the Farm Bill Conference Report. "I've maintained from the beginning that this farm bill ought to be about standing up for America's farm and ranch families who are going through some very hard times. And we have kept faith with that commitment.

"Farm country and rural America will be better off under this farm bill than they were before," Conaway said. "I want to thank our leadership in the House, Sec. Perdue and President Trump. Because of our work this year, rural America and farm and ranch country know we have their backs."

PCG Executive Vice President Steve Verett noted the significance of the bill withstanding several challenges throughout the process.

"We had champions fighting for us, and it took a great coalition to push this bill to the finish line," Verett said. "As always, there are those who want nothing more than to completely gut provisions that are vital to our farming operations, compromising our ability to preserve our family farms, and we successfully blocked various efforts to do that.

"I cannot say enough about those who have spent countless hours in Washington, DC, working on behalf of farmers across the nation, and I am proud that Plains Cotton Growers was a part of that team," Verett said.

Texas Cotton Crop Estimates Increase

Friday, December 14, 2018

By Mary Jane Buerkle

Texas High Plains cotton growers remain on pace to produce a 4 million bale-plus crop for the third time in as many years, according to the latest upland cotton production estimates released on Tuesday by the National Agricultural Statistics Service in their December report.

Estimates for the region now are at 4,250,000 bales, up 80,000 bales from the November NASS report. Northern High Plains growers are expected to produce 2 million bales, and Southern High Plains growers are expected to produce 2.25 million bales, both down from 2017 thanks in large part to various weather events throughout the season, from drought to hail to heavy rain.

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Yield per acre for the Northern High Plains is 923 pounds, and 720 for the Southern High Plains, both up from November. Harvested acres remained the same as the October and November reports – 1,040,000 in the NHP and 1,500,000 in the SHP. The abandonment rate remains at about 47 percent, most of which is dryland acreage.

Statewide, the production number increased to 7 million bales, up 300,000 from the projected 6.7 million in the November report. The bulk of the increase came from the Coastal Bend and Upper Coast regions of Texas. The nationwide estimate for upland cotton remained at 17.8 million bales, up slightly from the November report but down 12 percent from 2017.

Up to 10 inches of snow fell in parts of the PCG service area last weekend, again bringing harvest to a halt for those who were affected by that weather system. PCG estimates that the region is about 80 percent harvested at this point, but with this additional precipitation, it is uncertain when some growers will be able to get back into the field. These weather conditions could contribute to quality issues in unharvested cotton. Ginning and classing activity remained strong.

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Lubbock Master Marketer Workshop Rapidly Filling

Friday, December 7, 2018 By Kay Ledbetter, AgriLife TODAY

A Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Master Marketer program is scheduled January through March at the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Agricultural Research Services Auditorium, 3810 4th St. in Lubbock.

Master Marketer is a national, award-winning, risk-management educational program where participants learn how to develop marketing plans, evaluate marketing alternatives, manage production and price risk, and execute a risk management and marketing plan.

A free leveling workshop on the basics of futures and options markets will be held on Jan. 22 for anyone who doesn't think they are ready for intermediate to advanced level training. The actual program and other sessions will be Jan. 23-24, Feb. 6-7, Feb. 20-21 and March 6-7.

The final date to register is Jan. 20, but Dr. Jackie Smith, program coordinator and AgriLife Extension economist in Lubbock, said interest is high, and the limited seating will be filled quickly.

The registration fee for the program is \$350, which includes noon meals and educational materials. For detailed program information and to register, go online to <https://agriliferegister.tamu.edu/MasterMarketer>.

"Only 60 participants can be accepted, and we already have 40 signed up, so don't wait to register," Smith said.

The 64-hour curriculum is offered as four, two-day sessions held every two weeks. It is the most intensive marketing/risk management training provided by Extension anywhere in the U.S., Smith said.

The following is a schedule and topics:

Session I, Jan. 23-24: Review of Market Basics – budgets, break-evens, seasonality and the importance of a marketing plan, Working with a Lender, and Policy.

Session II, Feb. 6-7: Weather, Livestock Fundamentals, Crop and Livestock Products, and Crop Insurance Decision Aids.

Session III, Feb. 20-21: Technical Analysis, Cotton and Grain Marketing Issues and Strategies, and Tying It All Together.

Session IV, Feb. March 6-7: Cotton and Grain Fundamentals, Trading Exercise and Legal Issues.

Program sponsors include AgriLife Extension, Texas Corn Producers Board, Texas Farm Bureau, Texas Grain Sorghum Producers Board, Texas Wheat Producers Board, Cotton State Support Committee, Risk Management Agency/USDA and Capital Farm Credit.

For more information, contact Welch at 979-845-8011 or jmwelch@tamu.edu; or Smith at 806-746-6101 or Jackie.smith@ag.tamu.edu.

Upcoming Area Ag Conferences

January 11 – West Plains Crops Conference, 8 a.m.-3 p.m., Sundown Room, South Plains College, **Levelland**. CEUs available. More info: Kerry Siders, EA-IPM, or Wes Utley, CEA-AG/NR, (806) 894-3159.

January 15– Ochiltree Crop Profitability Meeting, 10 a.m.-Noon, Ochiltree County Expo Center, 402 Expo Drive, **Perryton**. More info: Scott Strawn, CEA-AG/NR, (806) 435-4501.

January 15 – Southern Mesa Ag Conference, time TBA, Forrest Park Community Center, **Lamesa**. CEUs available. More info: Tommy Doederlein, EA-IPM, or Gary Roschetzsky, CEA-AG/NR, (806) 872-3444.

January 16 – SE Panhandle Ag Conference, 8 a.m.-3 p.m., Kathy Fowler Insurance Ball Room, **Memphis**. CEUs available, cost \$10 at the door. More info: Josh Brooks, CEA-AG/NR, (806) 259-3015.

January 17 – South Plains Ag Conference, 8 a.m.-4 p.m., Texas Red Wine Event Center, 2127 US 380, **Brownfield**. CEUs available, including auxin training. Cost \$10 at the door. More info: Geoff Cooper, CEA-AG/NR, (806) 637-4060.

January 23 – NW Panhandle Cotton Conference, 8 a.m.-3:30 p.m., Rita Blanca Coliseum, **Dalhart**. Three CEUs in IPM available. No cost. More info: Mike Bragg, CEA-AG/NR, (806) 244-4434.

January 25 – Caprock Cotton Conference, 7 a.m.-5:30 p.m., Floyd County Friends Unity Center, **Muncy** (between Floydada and Lockney on U.S. Highway 70). CEUs available. More info: Cristen Brooks, Floyd County CEA-AG/NR, (806) 983-4912, or Dr. Caitlin Jackson, Crosby County CEA-AG/NR, (806) 675-2347.

January 28 – Top of Texas Cotton Conference, 8 a.m.-4 p.m., M.K. Brown Auditorium, 1100 W. Coronado Drive, **Pampa**. Three CEUs in IPM available; no cost. More info: Jody Bradford, Carson County CEA-AG/NR, (806) 537-3882.

January 28 – Cotton Pre-Plant Meeting, 10:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m., Happy State Bank Conference Room, 500 Main St., **Silverton**. More info: Mason Carter, CEA-AG/NR, (806) 823-2522.

Editor's Note:

"Cotton News", a weekly service of Plains Cotton Growers to the cotton industry and news media in the 41-county High Plains area, is mailed from Lubbock each Friday. Its contents are confined to news items and comments pertaining to the High Plains cotton industry which is so vital to U.S. all. Anyone interested in making comments about the contents of this column can call 806-792-4904 or Email PCG at: editor@plainscotton.org