

Government Shutdown Impacts USDA Functions

Friday, December 28, 2018

By Mary Jane Buerkle

The federal government remained in a partial shutdown today as Congress continues to work toward an agreement with President Trump regarding funding initiatives going into the new year.

The House and Senate were back in DC this week, but as of press time, the partial shutdown remained in place. A news release from the U.S. Department of Agriculture detailed which functions will remain available at the present time.

“During a shutdown, we will leverage our existing resources as best we can to continue to provide the top-notch service people expect,” USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue said in the release.

Cotton classing will continue because it is supported by user fees, and USDA Market News Service will operate. However, other statistical and economic reports and projections, including the World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates Report, will not be issued during the shutdown.

One of the most significant issues for cotton during the shutdown is maintaining the marketing loan program through the Commodity Credit Corporation. As long as the Farm Service Agency is in operation, growers can place cotton into or redeem cotton out of the loan. However, should the shutdown continue and FSA employees are furloughed after the close of business today, the loan program would be completely frozen until the shutdown is lifted.

The recently-announced second round of Market Facilitation Payments would be issued through the close of business today, provided growers have signed into the program and made any necessary adjustments. Growers have until May 1 to provide production records to FSA.

PCG has inquired to the USDA about making the loan program and the MFP program “essential” so they could continue through the shutdown, especially as growers are wrapping up harvest and establishing cash flow going into next year, but those programs unfortunately do not fall under the guidelines set by the Office of Management and Budget regarding essential programs.

More information is at <https://www.usda.gov/shutdownplans>.

HPWD: Annual Water Level Measurements Begin January 2

Friday, December 21, 2018

From High Plains Water District

Beginning Jan. 2, HPWD personnel will start water level measurements to determine the effect of 2018 pumping on groundwater levels in aquifers within the district.

These annual measurements are made in a network of more than 1,350 privately-owned wells. These observation wells are spaced at a density of approximately one well per nine square miles throughout the 16-county HPWD service area.

“We want the public to be aware that our staff will be visiting observation well sites from early January until completion of this work effort. They will be driving white pickup trucks that are clearly identified as Water District vehicles,” said HPWD Manager Jason Coleman.

These water level data are made available to the public through an interactive map on the HPWD website (map.hpwd.org). Persons may access annual observation well data, annual supplemental well data, and daily water level data in select wells using this feature.

An introduction to the interactive map and discussion of each of its features are included in tutorial videos posted to the HPWD YouTube channel.

Those without computer access are encouraged to contact Jed Leibbrandt at the HPWD office to request a printed report of annual water level measurement data for a county or counties of interest.

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 Roschetsky, 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.

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January 29 – Llano Estacado Cotton Conference, 8 a.m.-3:30 p.m., Bailey County Electric Cooperative, 610 E. American Blvd., **Muleshoe**. CEUs available. More info: John David Gonzales, EA-IPM or Curtis Preston, Bailey County CEA-AG/NR, (806) 252-4583, or Sergio Mendez, Parmer County CEA-AG/NR, (806) 251-5120.

January 30 – Pre-Plant Producers Meeting, 8:30 a.m.-1 p.m., Kuhlman Extension Center, 200 N. Brown Road, **Canyon**. More info: Dr. J.D. Ragland, CEA-AG/NR, (806) 468-5543.

Longtime AgriLife Research Economist Dr. James Richardson to Retire

Friday, December 14, 2018 By Blair Fannin, AgriLife TODAY

Since the mid-1980s, the simulation model developed by a Texas A&M AgriLife Research economist has been used to evaluate countless farm bill proposals by Congress to determine both the good and bad financial outcomes for U.S. farmers.

After a 41-year career with the Texas A&M System, Dr. James Richardson, co-director of the Agricultural and Food Policy Center at Texas A&M University in College Station, has decided the time is right to retire, effective Dec. 31.

Richardson's timing is fitting considering a new \$867 million farm bill, which was analyzed using the simulation model, is being prepared to be signed by President Donald Trump.

FLIPSIM, or Farm Level Income Policy Simulator, is the simulation model Richardson first coded in 1980 and has garnered more than \$38 million in funding for work by the Agricultural and Food Policy Center at Texas A&M to simulate every farm bill since the mid-1980s for lawmakers, farmers and commodity groups wanting comprehensive policy analysis.

"It takes a proposal, runs through a number of simulations to analyze potential outcomes," Richardson said. "Through the years, it has proven its worth, and even today it continues to give a broad-stroke analysis of potential peaks and valleys of economic viability for farmers under a variety of policy and trade situations."

In 1983, Richardson saw a devastating economic downturn in the farm economy ahead.

"The model was indicating a farm economic crisis," he said. "Several economists across the country said I was wrong. Two years later, we had the worst crisis in modern history."

FLIPSIM has been used repeatedly to analyze countless draft farm bill proposals by both U.S. House and Senate agriculture committees. The computer model is a far cry from paper calculator worksheets used by farm economists in the late '70s and early '80s to decide which farm program proposal would be best.

"In 2002, the first year we went to a web-based decision aid, the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Farm Service Agency partnered with us. We had 410,000 farm analyses of base and yield projections," Richardson said. "That told us that this type of decision aid was in high demand and that farmers were getting some value out of this online tool, which is what the Ag and Food Policy Center is all about, creating value for farmers across the nation."

The power of the simulation model comes from using data from real farmers. The Policy Center maintains a database for 100 representative farms across the U.S. Farmers meet with Agricultural and Food Policy Center economists throughout the year to discuss

their financial operations and provide updated cost and production data for the FLIPSIM database.

"We are now working with the third generation of some of these farmers," Richardson said. "Some have passed down their operations, retired, or unfortunately, gone broke. We've gotten to know farmers and ranchers in all of the states. That's what makes the Agricultural and Food Policy Center so popular in Washington."

The center, also known as AFPC, got its start back in the mid-1980s on a Friday afternoon when Dr. Neville Clarke, former director of the Texas A&M Agricultural Experiment Station, requested Richardson and fellow economist Dr. Ron Knutson prepare a proposal for establishing a food and policy center. Their deadline was Monday morning in preparation for a mid-week Texas A&M Board of Regents meeting.

"We worked through the weekend and had it ready by Monday. The center was stamped for approval by the Regents that Wednesday," Richardson said. "We didn't waste any time getting things started."

One of Richardson's first moves was hiring a young graduate student, Ed Smith, who would rise through the ranks and later become director of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Another good hire was a young student, Joe Outlaw, who is now co-director for the Policy Center.

"My expertise is policy and risk analysis, which I merged when I built FLIPSIM. What I needed back then was someone to go visit with farmers and come back with real data and problems. Smith and Knutson served that role, and we never ran out of problems to analyze," Richardson said.

Through the years, AFPC has had several students who have gone on to have careers with Texas A&M AgriLife economics. Richardson has advised several graduate students, including Outlaw, as well as other College Station-based AgriLife Extension economists including Drs. Luis Ribera, David Anderson and Aleksandre Maisashvili. Rounding out the list is Dr. Stephen Klose, who leads AgriLife Extension's FARM Assist program in College Station.

Richardson came to Texas A&M in 1978 as an assistant professor. Since that time he has advised 66 graduate students, published more than 150 journal articles and written more than 500 publications. Spanning Richardson's office wall are more than 21 major awards, including a Regents Professor Service Award and multiple Texas A&M AgriLife Vice Chancellor's Awards.

"There are two that stand out, but that one right there is the one I think is the most coveted and the one I most admire," said Outlaw, pointing to the award Richardson was given by the Texas Commodity Symposium. "That tells you right there you are valued by all of the major commodity production groups across the state from corn to cotton, to grain sorghum, wheat and peanuts. That represents so many Texas farmers."

Richardson said one of the most gratifying aspects of his tenure was showing how technology can be used to help the farmer become more profitable.

"We've gone from handheld calculators to web-based decision aids," he said. "These are state-of-the-art simulation models. That's what has made the AFPC so valuable to farmers; along with the great people here, the great team, that's what has made this center so great."

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