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With the midterms behind us, Americans have gained some clarity as to what Congress will look like for the next two years. However, there’s still a lot up in the air for family farmers and ranchers. The 2014 Farm Bill expired at the end of September, and there is a great deal of uncertainty about the content and timing of its replacement. Many are optimistic that a new bill will be passed before the end of the year, which would provide some amount of stability and predictability in farm country. But there are other ongoing issues that need to be addressed, including a trade war with China and other major trading partners, the relentless rise of agricultural mega-mergers, the use of biofuels in the American transportation sector, and the regulation and labeling of animal cell culture products.

**Midterm Election Results Could Influence Farm Bill**

Voters came out in record numbers for the midterm elections this year, a likely symptom of greater political engagement and anxiety. The outcomes of these elections will have significant implications for local, state, and federal issues - including food and agriculture.

Though trade, renewable fuels, corporate consolidation, and other important farm policy will undoubtedly be influenced by shifts within the House and Senate, the upcoming farm bill will probably be among the first and most notable affected pieces of legislation. Should the farm bill drag into the new year, the entire process would start anew, Each chamber would again need to pass its own version of the legislation, and the differences between the two would ultimately be reconciled by a new conference committee. The makeup of the committees may shift, particularly on the House side where leadership positions will markedly change. Because Democrats regained control of the House, current Ranking Member Collin Peterson (D-MN) would take over Chairman Mike Conaway's (R-TX) role at the head of the House Committee on Agriculture. The final bill would then need to be approved by a Congressional vote and signed by President Trump.

It is unclear how precisely the outcome of the midterms might affect the content and timing of the farm bill. However, many expect that this will expedite its passage, as Republicans would prefer to negotiate and vote while they still hold a majority. Many Democrats are also motivated to pass the bill this year, so as not to unnecessarily extend the process and leave farmers and ranchers, rural communities, and hungry Americans without crucial support.

**200+ Farm, Food and Rural Groups Endorse Merger Moratorium**

National Farmers Union (NFU) joined a coalition of 213 farm, food, rural, faith and consumer advocacy organizations to deliver a letter to Congress endorsing food and agribusiness merger moratorium bills and to urge members of the House and Senate to cosponsor the legislation.

Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Representative Mark Pocan (D-WI) introduced the Food and Agribusiness Merger Moratorium and Antitrust Review Act of 2018 companion bills earlier this year. These bills would impose an 18-month moratorium on mega-mergers that have swept the agribusiness, food manufacturing and grocery industries. This wave of consolidation has contributed to falling farm prices, declining farm incomes, stagnant wages for food workers, and economic stagnation in rural communities. The bills would also establish a commission to study the impacts of consolidation in the food and agricultural sectors on farmers, rural communities, and consumers.

"Corporate consolidation has long been one of the greatest challenges plaguing family farmers, ranchers and rural communities," said NFU President Roger Johnson. "We applaud Senator Booker and Representative Pocan for introducing this legislation and urge other members of Congress to join the effort to pass this legislation."

**NFU Encourages Move to High Octane Fuels**

In late August, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposed the Safer Affordable Fuel-Efficient (SAFE) Vehicles Rule for Model Years 2021-2026 Passenger Cars and Light Trucks, which would amend certain existing Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) and greenhouse gas emissions standards. The rule, among other things, recognizes the "potential benefits high octane fuels could provide," and requested comment on the benefits of increasing fuel octane levels.

In comments submitted in late October, National Farmers Union (NFU) President Roger Johnson said he was encouraged to see the EPA's acknowledgement and urged the administration to move towards high level blends of ethanol. "There is widespread agreement regarding the need to move this country toward high octane fuels to take advantage of improved engine technologies for vehicles," wrote Johnson, noting that mid-level ethanol blends ranging from E20 to E40 are the "most economical high octane fuels available today."

Johnson highlighted the myriad benefits of high-octane fuels, including "air emissions reductions, better oil conservation, and greater energy security," as well as lower costs for consumers and "billions of dollars of capital investment, millions of dollars of new tax base, and many thousands of new good paying jobs with benefits" in rural America.

NFU also launched radio ad buy urging President Donald Trump to keep his promises to family farmers by immediately implementing year-round E-15 and reversing the losses caused by the misappropriation of small refinery exemptions. "Farmers are still at a net loss from Trump's actions on biofuels," the ad says, due to the EPA's allocation of waivers exempting large oil refiners from complying with the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS). This decision has "destroyed 2 billion gallons of ethanol demand," a volume that far exceeds any increased use of E15 expected over the next five years.

**SDFU Advocates Stronger Meat Labeling**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) hosted a joint meeting in October to discuss the nomenclature, regulation, and jurisdiction of animal cell culture products.

Representatives from both agencies as well as a number of diverse stakeholders spoke to the various costs and benefits of allowing either the USDA or FDA or some combination thereof to regulate the production of such products. They also argued for various labeling practices, ranging from "clean meat" to "animal cell culture."

Several members of South Dakota Farmers Union (SDFU) submitted testimony advocating transparent and truthful labeling of meat products. Karla Hofhenke represented SDFU at the hearing, while Eric Sumption spoke on behalf of South Dakota Stockgrowers. SDFU members Rocky Forman and Brett Kenzy also testified.

"Allowing a protein that is grown in a petri dish to be labeled as "meat" is misleading and creates consumer confusion," said Hofhenke. "The only sure way to avoid misleading consumers is to restrict the definition of meat to the tissue or flesh of an animal that has been born, raised, and harvested in the traditional manner."

National Farmers Union (NFU) established the issue of accurately labeling imitation meat products and animal cell culture products as a Special Order of Business at the organization's 116th Anniversary Convention in March. In September, NFU submitted comments to the FDA encouraging the establishment of a definition for "meat" that fairly and consistently informs consumers about the difference between meat products that come from livestock raised in the traditional manner and alternative proteins that are created in a laboratory.

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The Washington Corner can also be found at www.nfu.org/corner.