



Northeast
Agribusiness
& Feed Alliance

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Northeast Agribusiness and Feed Alliance Testifies on 2018 Farm Bill

The Northeast Agribusiness and Feed Alliance (NEAFA) provided testimony to the Vermont Milk Commission on the 2018 Farm Bill during a listening session in Randolph, Vermont earlier this month. Art Whitman, Chair of the NEAFA Government Relations Committee, informed the Commission on farm bill issues of interest to the dairy and feed industries in Vermont. Whitman explained the Margin Protection Program (MPP) could be an effective price stabilization program for the dairy industry and urged for revision of the MPP to account for regional feed costs rather than implement a single national feed price formula. He also suggested that dairy farmers be able to access additional risk management tools like the Livestock Gross Margin program.

Vermont farmers face water quality challenges and regulatory pressures that can be met with assistance from federal conservation programs. Whitman testified that the next farm bill should make substantial investments in voluntary locally-driven, flexible conservation programs such as Regional Conservation Partnership Program and Conservation Innovation Grants. These programs are able to target regional issues and efficiently leverage private and state funding.

Whitman further commented that increased funding for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, Agricultural Management Assistance and for easement programs, such as the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program is needed to address program backlogs and priorities.

Vermont dairy farmers benefit from the Market Access Program (MAP) to promote American dairy products that are in competition with heavily subsidized foreign products. Whitman stated that NEAFA supports increased funding of MAP to better promote America's dairy products across the globe.

Funding for rural development projects benefit Vermont dairy farmers and other small business owners. Over the years, rural development programs have multiplied and morphed to the point where it's difficult to determine which programs are appropriate for which projects. Whitman explained that the 2018 Farm Bill offers an opportunity to consolidate and simplify programs and make them more user-friendly as well as easier to administer. Lack of broadband connectivity and high-speed internet access is a significant issue for Vermont rural businesses. Funding in the 2018 Farm Bill should reflect the needs of Vermont dairy farmers to have connectivity to increase communication efficiency.

Whitman stated that land grant universities provide the basis for advancement of dairy production in the U. S. Insufficient funding over the last decade has crippled the ability of the land grant system to address emerging issues in rural communities. The 2018 Farm Bill should include sufficient funds to support infrastructure reinvestments at land-grant universities and address deferred maintenance at the nation's agricultural research facilities.

A robust animal disease program is needed to protect animal agriculture and prevent catastrophic events that could threaten the U.S. food supply. Whitman advised the Vermont Milk Commission of the need to expand on the authorization for the National Animal Health Laboratory Network, a comprehensive system to bring together the federal government with states, industry, universities, and other agricultural stakeholders to reduce the impact of high-consequence animal diseases.

The Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) has overhauled American food safety regulation from response-driven to preventive and farm-focused but the Act faces a variety of implementation challenges. Whitman explained that the next farm bill should provide resources to assist producers and processors in complying with FSMA, especially via low-cost loans for infrastructure upgrades.

The Northeast Agribusiness and Feed Alliance is a 300-member association committed to

supporting a thriving northeast agricultural community through advocacy, education and collaboration. Members of the Alliance include feed, seed, fertilizer companies, financial service providers, transportation companies, veterinarians, nutritional services providers, and professional advisors.

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