

NCBA: Cattle industry makes progress on environmental policy

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

There have been some wins and some setbacks for ranchers this year when it comes to federal environmental policy, but it's moving in the right direction under the Trump administration.

The setbacks can be attributed to the courts and the gains can be credited to regulatory relief from the Environmental Protection Agency, Scott Yager, chief environmental counsel for National Cattlemen's Beef Association, told ranchers at the Idaho Cattle Association annual convention.



Scott Yager

Work remains to finalize the repeal of the waters of the U.S. rule — called WOTUS — expanding Environmental Protection Agency and Army Corps of Engineers jurisdiction under the Clean Water Act. The rule had been suspended while the agencies worked to replace it, and two federal courts blocked implementation in 24 states.

But a "zombie" WOTUS came back with a South Carolina court deciding the administration failed to comply with rulemaking requirements in suspending the rule — making it law in the 26 states not protected by an injunction, he said.

If approved by Congress, language in a House appropriations bill and the House version of the farm bill would repeal it. If not, the administration is in the process of repealing and replacing it, he said.

"We need a narrow definition closer to traditional navigable waters. We want a

rule that's understandable so producers can go out on their property and know" where the rule applies, he said.

NCBA is fighting WOTUS in courts, in the agencies and in Congress. And a broad swath of industry has banded together in a litigation coalition, he said.

A proposal for a new rule is expected soon. It will ultimately end up in the Supreme Court, but there's a pretty good chance of winning if it doesn't have any procedural faults, he said.

On more sure footing is an exclusion for agriculture from reporting livestock emissions to federal agencies under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), which came into effect in 1980 to clean up toxic waste sites.

EPA exempted agriculture from reporting livestock emissions under the act, but environmentalists sued and a court vacated the exemption in 2017. NCBA (and others) sought a legislative solution in Congress, resulting in an exemption being included in an omnibus bill signed into law in March.

Without the exemption, the law would have applied to about 200,000 livestock operations and there's very little data to inform that reporting. Activists oppose the exemption because they want information on those operations to push regulations. CERCLA also requires follow-up reporting a year after the initial report. Such reporting would open the door to citizen lawsuits, he said.

Farm Bureaus set up California wildfire, disaster relief funds

SACRAMENTO — The California Farm Bureau Federation has established a Farm and Rural Disaster Fund to help farms, ranches and rural communities damaged by wildfires, floods and other natural disasters.

The fund has been created under the

Farm Bureau's charitable foundation known as the California Bountiful Foundation. Donations maybe made at www.californiabountiful.com or www.cfbf.com.

Checks maybe sent payable to: California Bountiful Foundation, Farm and Rural Disaster Fund, 2300 River Plaza Drive,

Sacramento, CA, 95833. Attn: Financial Services.

The Butte County Farm Bureau and Butte Ag Foundation have created a Camp Fire Animal Agriculture Assistance Fund. www.butteagfoundation.org.

— Dan Wheat

U.S. ag negotiator talks trade deals

Agenda includes Japan, European Union and China

By GEORGE PLAVEN
Capital Press

PORTLAND — Ambassador Gregg Doud arrived in Portland around midnight Nov. 17 after an exhausting 25-hour flight from Morocco in North Africa, where U.S. trade officials spent last week working to reopen U.S. beef exports into the country for the first time since 2003.

"This is what we do in this job," said Doud, who serves as chief agricultural negotiator for the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative. "It was a lot of arguing back and forth, a lot of heavy-duty conversation, but nonetheless we got it done."

Doud was the featured speaker to wrap up the annual Tri-State Grain Growers Convention in Portland, updating farmers about the Trump administration's trade priorities with Europe, Japan and China.

The U.S. recently implemented tariffs on \$200 billion worth of products from China, which led to retaliatory tariffs on \$60 billion worth of U.S.



George Plaven/Capital Press

Ambassador Gregg Doud, chief agricultural negotiator for the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, spoke Nov. 17 about developing new international trade agreements at the Tri-State Grain Growers Convention in Portland.

goods targeting agriculture. The USDA stepped up over the summer with \$12 billion in emergency relief for farmers and ranchers who will be affected by the escalating trade war.

Doud said the U.S. has two major agricultural disputes with China to be resolved before the World Trade Organization. The first involves Chinese subsidies to wheat, corn and rice farmers, which he believes exceeded \$100

billion over several years.

"But we don't really know, because China hasn't reported to the WTO what it spent on its subsidies since 2010," Doud said. "They're the only country in the world that has done that. It's truly outrageous."

At the same time, the USDA amended China's corn stocks from about 58.5 million metric tons, to more than 200 million metric tons. China today has more than 60 percent of the world's corn, and more than half the residual supply of wheat in the world, Doud said.

"So, when their support price for wheat in China is double the world price, China, you're killing the price of wheat for every other farmer in the world," he said. "You've got to play by the rules."

Much attention is now on President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping, who will sit down at the end of the month at the G20 Summit in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Doud said the hope is that conversation can lead to another, and then another, until both countries are ready to finally sit down at the bargaining table.

"We're not trying to raise the stature of the U.S. and de-

crease the stature of China," Doud said. "As they evolve, it's going to be in their best interest to do these things as well."

Doud praised the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, which the Trump administration has proposed to replace the North American Free Trade Agreement but still needs congressional approval. Next on the list, he said, is a bilateral trade agreement with Japan, announced between President Trump and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the United Nations General Assembly in September.

As a former market analyst for U.S. Wheat Associates, Doud said he understands how crucial the Japanese market is for Northwest wheat growers. The situation will only become more urgent as terms under the new Trans-Pacific Partnership come online at the end of the year between Japan and Canada, and the European Union-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement kicks in by April 2019.

"We're going to be in real trouble," Doud said. "If you lose that market share, I don't know if you ever get it back. I understand how important this is to get this right, get this done, get this squared away as quickly as we can."

SW Idaho producers eye crop changes for 2019

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

Janie Burns already is downsizing Meadowlark Farm for 2019 in case the ground she leases for raising grass-fed lambs is sold for housing or another non-agricultural use.

"It went up for sale," the Nampa, Idaho, producer said. "With new owners, it's possible I won't have to change anything. But I don't know, so I am taking the proactive step of reducing my operation."

Southwest Idaho food producers making annual decisions about operational changes have a wider-than-usual array of variables to consider for 2019. They range from trade disputes and a strong dollar — which makes U.S. goods less price-competitive internationally — a potentially warmer winter that could produce less water for irriga-

tion, loss of farmland to other uses and higher interest rates on top of continued low prices for many commodities.

Dell Winegar, who farms outside Fruitland and serves as president of the Idaho Onion Growers Association, may adjust his 2019 crop percentages due to water concerns.

"If water becomes an issue, we will probably plant a few less acres of onions, potatoes or less acreage of corn for sure," he said.

Most weather models predict an El Nino winter weather pattern, often associated with greater potential for warmer weather in the northern half of the U.S. The first half of November was mostly dry in southwest Idaho.

"If the water situation is in the forefront of our minds now, that is a worry," Winegar said. "As the water season progresses, we will be able to make decisions as to how

many acres we can plant of higher-value crops" that use more water.

For producers seeking lower-input alternatives, seed crops are among those likely to be more attractive than lower-priced corn or wheat even though many seed crops also are priced below long-term averages, he said.

Seed prices lately are pressured by trade issues, a strong U.S. dollar and lower commodity prices, said Sid Freeman of Sunny View Farms north of Caldwell.

"Most of the farmers I know agree renegotiation of the trade agreements needed to happen," he said. "But we also agree it's going to take a long period of time to be able to receive the benefits from those renegotiations. We've just got to be able to hang on long

enough to be able to do that."

Commodities fetching low prices include those purchased for feed by dairy producers, who have less to spend due to prolonged low milk prices, Freeman said.

Lower prices for feed-related crops creates "competition for the ground" by other crops with higher price prospects, he said. "Like some of my winter wheat I would tear out and put in sweet corn grown for seed."

But Freeman in 2019 plans to stick with crop changes he made from 2017 to '18 in response to economic and market conditions. Sunny View is roughly equally divided among sugar beets, seed beans and soft white winter wheat after dropping field corn for the 2018 season.

Galen Lee of Sunnyside Farms near New Plymouth runs a dairy and feedlot in addition to growing sugar beets and peppermint. Sunnyside grows alfalfa hay and silage feed corn for its cattle.

He plans to make small changes in some crop percentages in 2019, mainly to keep field sizes efficient, he said. Feed acreage also won't change much.

"It's difficult because milk prices are down, and that hurts," Lee said. "We still have to raise feed for the livestock. Smaller dairies have less money coming in from milk sales, so it's harder for them to pay much more for feed and other inputs. They are having to get more efficient, too."

At Meadowlark Farm, Burns said she is now reducing her headcount of breeding ewes by about one-third. Whether or not the property she leases is sold, "I am taking the proactive step of reducing my operation."

Per-unit prices could increase a bit since she will have fewer lambs for sale, she said. "I will have to be pretty particular where I sell my limited supply. Price will no doubt reflect a little less supply."

Meridian, Idaho, farmer Drew Eggers plans to grow slightly less peppermint in 2019, and a bit more corn and winter wheat "more due to crop rotations than prices of crops or anything like that," he said. Pinto bean acreage will be about the same.

Peppermint growers don't often make big changes year to year because the plant is a perennial. It's harvested every year, "and the good years are the second and third years," he said. "And once you take

mint out, you need to leave it out for twice as long as it was in mint" before you can replant it.

Apple trees are another long-term proposition when it comes to making changes, producing the first crop some five years after they are planted, said Cathy Cabalo, owner of Cabalo's Orchard and Gardens in Kuna. The orchard years ago began replacing Red Delicious rows with other varieties, and more recently to make room for others that grow cider apples; new trees are planted after the ground stays fallow for a year.

Also a concern is higher interest rates. Annual yield on the 10-year U.S. Treasury bond, tied to many property and equipment loans, stood at 3.057 percent Nov. 19 compared to a one-year range of 2.69 to 3.46 percent. The Prime Lending Rate — which banks charge their best customers and is used to calculate rates on many producers' annual operating lines — was at 5.25 percent, up a percentage point from a year ago. Also up by a 1 percent in the past year, to 2.25 percent, is the Federal Funds rate, at which institutions lend to each other, usually overnight.

"It's going to affect everybody a little bit differently" based on amounts borrowed, Freeman said. "It's a bitter pill we have to swallow."

He is watching a range of agricultural market and economic factors as 2019 approaches.

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