

NAWG president touts market development, food aid in next farm bill

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The president of the National Association of Wheat Growers asked lawmakers to double funding for market development and boost donations of U.S. wheat in international food aid programs in the next farm bill.

Nicole Berg, a Washington wheat farmer, testified April 6 before the House Agriculture Committee's Livestock and Foreign Agriculture Subcommittee as it reviewed Title III programs in the farm bill covering agricultural trade promotion and international food aid.

Trade promotion

The current farm bill provides \$200 million for the Market Access Program and \$34.5 million for the Foreign Market Development program. NAWG hopes to see those amounts doubled.

Those funding levels become inadequate as costs and the number of grant applicants increase, Berg said.

It has been more than 15 years since Congress increased funding for MAP and 20 years for FMD. During that time, cooperators like U.S. Wheat Associates, the overseas marketing arm of the industry, have been forced to reduce staff, she said.

The Agricultural Trade Promotion Program temporarily staved off further marketing reductions and allowed a much-needed increase in programming, but those funds run out in 2024.

"Significant" increases in the MAP and FMD baseline funding levels will be critical as ATP funding is exhausted, Berg said.

Food aid

The last two farm bills have granted the United States Agency for International Development flexibility in how it implements programs, but it's mostly



Nicole Berg

gone toward cash donations or vouchers.

NAWG would like more balance if the need isn't urgent and there's time for USAID and USDA Foreign Agricultural Service to secure U.S. wheat, said

Jake Westlin, NAWG vice president of policy and communications.

"If we have time to do it, let's do it with U.S.-grown wheat and not be purchasing with U.S. taxpayer dollars the wheat of our competitors," Westlin said.

Once a crisis is resolved, Westlin said, the country might be more inclined to buy U.S. wheat.

As the costs of shipping and fuel increase, the amount of commodities donated through food aid continually decreases.

Berg asked the subcommittee to address the higher costs of providing food aid.

She cited a Congressional Research Service Report, saying that procurement of commodities for in-kind food aid made up approximately 40% of funding in the 2020 fiscal year. These commodities are subject to U.S.-flag shipping requirements in the Cargo Preference Act of 1954, which requires at least 50% of the gross tonnage of U.S. government-financed cargoes must be shipped on U.S.-flag vessels.

Shipping on U.S.-flag vessels typically costs more than on foreign-flag vessels, which raises the cost of providing food aid. This reduces the volume of food aid that can be provided.

Congress should evaluate the required threshold for food aid programs, consider an increase to the Food for Progress Transportation Cap, and work with the maritime industry to find a creative solution that maximizes food aid while keeping the maritime industry strong, Berg said.

Avian flu causes a surge in egg prices

By **BRAD CARLSON**
Capital Press

Egg prices have jumped by more than half in recent weeks as the avian influenza outbreak continues to shrink the Midwest flock and nationwide demand increases.

Midwest farmers have had to kill more than 46 million chickens and turkeys in an effort to stanch the spread of avian flu.

USDA April 1 pegged cartoned, large white shell eggs from the Midwest at \$2.47 per dozen, up 91% from March 18.

In California, cartoned, cage-free eggs were \$3.32 per dozen April 1, up 63.5% from March 18.

Concerns over potential supply disruptions stemming from avian influenza outbreaks in commercial flocks are "keen on marketers' minds as the Easter marketing season has arrived," USDA said in its Egg Markets Overview.

Outbreaks in layer flocks in the Upper Midwest have "placed a damper on the marketplace as offerings remain tight on reduced production and sharp price increases have many buyers rethinking their market position," USDA said.

USDA said it appears much higher wholesale prices prompted grocers to shift feature promotions to cage-free eggs, now priced competitively and offering better margins.

The agency's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service said avian influenza had been found in 257 flocks — 166 of them commercial — as of April 4. More than 46.37 million birds have been affected.

Twenty-five states report having at least one infected flock. Wyoming is the only Western state affected so far.

"It's marching this way one step at a time," said Cliff Lillywhite, president and co-owner of Utah-based Oakdell Egg Farms, which sells in the Intermountain and Northwest states. "It gets closer every week. We are taking extreme biosecurity measures, for sure. It's scary."

The business is limiting visitors "and even where our employees can go," he said. "We're trying to prepare for the case when (avian flu) might be closer, because when it comes, everyone is going to have to lock down."

Lillywhite said if an avian influenza outbreak occurs, there would be no egg movement on or off the farm and widespread depopulation, or



Cliff Lillywhite of Oakdell Egg Farms in North Salt Lake, Utah.

culling, would be required.

Around 16 million laying hens have been culled this year, he said. "That's probably about 5%, but it's 5% during Easter season when people are trying to build inventories."

Rebuilding a population takes at least a year, Lillywhite said. After federal approval, chicks are brought in on a schedule that aims to meet hatcheries' capacity and other needs and to optimize laying schedules.

The company is paying more for the eggs it buys and charging more for eggs it produces, though he would not say by how much.

"It's a national market, and we buy eggs from the Midwest," Lillywhite said. "Just about everybody in the U.S. buys some from the Midwest. We are not going to buy from some of those areas."

Input and supply costs are also a concern, he said.

For its egg production, Oakdell's costs are "way up" on inputs such as packaging, freight and transportation, and feed, he said.

"We've got to stay whole. We can't absorb all these costs everybody passes on to us," Lillywhite said. "Huge costs have been passed to us, so we have to pass those on."



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Washington FFA convention moves to Kennewick

Washington FFA's state convention will move to Kennewick this year instead of its traditional meeting place on the Washington State University campus in Pullman.

The convention will be May 12-14 at Three Rivers Convention Center in Kennewick.

"The change was prompted by a policy change at WSU in the housing area. For anybody that stays in the dorms, they would require proof of COVID vaccination," Dany Cavadini, FFA executive director, told the Capital Press.

That's not a public high school requirement, and organizers didn't want to require students attending convention to have a COVID vaccination card, Cavadini said.

"Washington State University would love to host the Washington FFA Convention on the Pullman campus again this year," Phil Weiler, WSU vice president of university marketing and communications, told the Capital Press.

"As with all other events on WSU campuses across the state, however, participants would need to show proof of vaccination or a medical exemption in order to attend," he said.

Proof of vaccination is required for students to attend class and live in residence halls, Weiler said. It is also a requirement for members of the public to attend lectures, concerts and other events on campus.

FFA will follow COVID requirements at the time of the convention, Cavadini said.

"At this point in time, they're changing rapidly," she said. "We're paying attention to those and we're going to follow whatever rules are in place with the state and honoring school districts, to make sure we're following the rules."

This will be Washington FFA's 92nd convention. It has apparently never been anywhere other than Pullman.

"This is the first time in my memory, which goes back to 1968," said Dennis Wallace, state FFA adviser.

If WSU's requirement is eventually lifted, will the convention return to Pullman?

"I've gotten this question a lot, and I think at this point, it's too early to tell because we don't know what convention looks like at a different location," Cavadini said. "I'm not ruling out going back to Pullman, but I also want to see how convention looks in a different spot."

In scouting a new location, organizers considered availability. The Tri-Cities had the biggest space available on the already-established dates, she said.

Cavadini doesn't expect attendance to go down due to the move, noting that many more FFA chapters are within an hour's drive of the Tri-Cities than Pullman.

At the last in-person convention in 2019, 2,300 members and guests attended. Cavadini expects similar attendance this year.

"Kids are excited to get out, and we have seen record numbers at everything we've hosted," she said. "I think there is a thirst from the students to get out of the classroom and apply what they've learned. They've worked so hard over the past few years and haven't been able to participate at the same level we have (in the past)."

Washington FFA membership dipped about 20% in 2021, but is back up to roughly 12,000. The record is 12,400, she said.

Most state contests, such as career development events, take place before the convention, Cavadini said. Spring contests kicked off across the state in March, she said.

"(FFA members) should be excited that Washington FFA is back, live and in-person," Cavadini said. "We're going to celebrate all of the achievements of our students for the last year."



Dany Cavadini



The Washington FFA convention will be in person next month in Kennewick.

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