

Biden proposes to boost U.S. farm subsidies during war in Ukraine

By SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN
Capital Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. — As part of a \$33 billion funding request related to the war in Ukraine, the Biden administration has asked Congress to approve \$500 million in subsidies for U.S. farmers to encourage more domestic production of wheat, soybeans, rice and other commodities.

According to USDA, the goal of the request is to prompt U.S. farmers to produce more of certain commodities — especially wheat — which are experiencing a global shortage due to the war.

In a letter to U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., Biden wrote that his request “includes funding to support the production of United States food crops that are experiencing a global shortage due to the war in Ukraine.”

The proposal has two major components, accord-



Ben Lonergan/EO Media Group

A combine in a field of wheat. The Biden administration has asked Congress to consider approving \$500 million in farm subsidies to incentivize U.S. growers to boost production of certain commodities, including wheat, during the crisis in Ukraine.

ing to a fact sheet from the White House.

First, \$400 million would go toward increasing loan rates for two years for food crops including

wheat, rice, soybeans and oil. Under the proposal, wheat loan rates would go up 63%, oilseed up 40%, and loans for rice and pulse crops up 21%.

Second, the plan would use about \$100 million to pay a \$10 per acre incentive for farmers to increase wheat production through double-cropping wheat and

soybeans. This could be paid through crop insurance premiums.

“Through higher loan rates and crop insurance incentives, the request provides greater access to credit and lowers risk for farmers growing these commodities, while lowering costs for American consumers,” the White House said in a statement.

Advocates of the proposal say it could help U.S. farmers and boost the global food supply; critics say it’s a case of unnecessary market intervention from the government.

Some commodity groups have come out in favor of the proposal, including the National Association of Wheat Growers.

“NAWG appreciates the administration’s creative efforts to ensure a stable food supply for the American people and the world,” the wheat association said in a statement.

The association’s CEO, Chandler Goule, said mem-

bers of his organization “would like to see wheat production encouraged throughout the nation and incentivize both spring and winter wheat growers.”

Others, in contrast, aren’t so sure the proposal is a good idea. Some members of Congress appear skeptical about the use of loan rates as incentives to increase production, and some agricultural economists say it’s unclear why the administration would try to increase subsidies for crops that are already fetching high prices.

Critics have also pointed out that the timing of the proposal is odd since the wheat incentive is aimed at the 2023 crop, not this year’s crop.

“I don’t think that this sort of intervention from the government makes any sense, other than to read it in a pure political sense, that this is something they feel like they need to do,” Joe Glauber, former chief economist at USDA, told Politico.

Wildfire risk rising in parts of the West

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

Abnormally dry conditions in New Mexico and Arizona have caused an early start to this year’s Western wildfire season.

Jim Wallmann, a meteorologist at the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, said much of New Mexico and Arizona recorded their driest April on record, which led to the wildfire season starting early.

He said the Southwest’s peak season likely will stretch to around three months — until the summer monsoon starts in late June or early July.

“The monsoon will arrive on time, if not early, and it looks to be strong for the Southwest and Four Corners,” said Wallmann. That would bring relief to the Southwest, southern Great Basin and western Colorado



Jim Wallmann

for summer.

He said the monsoon most often does not substantially impact other geographic areas.

However, “if there are any significant moisture intrusions into Northern California and the Northwest, they could result in a significant number of new fires due to lightning,” he said.

If a farther-reaching monsoon packs substantial moisture, as occurred in 2014, it “could actually put a pause in the fire season for a week or two,” Wallmann said.

Recent heavy precipitation in the Northwest prompts concerns about rangelands, and “could result in a lot more grass,” Wallmann said May 2. “We started getting reports last week from east-

ern Oregon that their grass crop is starting to look really robust.”

Heavy precipitation in the Northwest through early June would delay the start of peak fire season, but forecasts see the pattern ending by mid-May, he said.

The Fire Center’s Predictive Services unit, in a May 1 forecast, said outlooks indicate below-normal precipitation is likely this summer across much of the Plains west through the central Rocky Mountains to the Northwest. Above-normal temperatures are likely across much of the continental U.S.

In the Northwest, elevated risk of large fires continues in central Oregon into June, mainly on dry and windy weather rather than lightning, the report said. This higher risk is expected to expand to southwest Oregon and central Washington in July.

Northern California’s risk of large fires is expected to be above normal in May across the San Francisco Bay Area, middle coast, and in Sacramento Valley and foothills areas. Heavy precipitation improved fuel moistures but came too late for some low-elevation plants.

Risk in the Northern Rockies could increase in June along that region’s south edge if spring rains do not materialize and temperatures are above normal.

The report said that in the Great Basin, some areas of southern and eastern Nevada with carryover grasses may see higher risk by May and June. Above-normal potential is likely by July and August in the higher terrain of northern Utah, the Sierra and parts of Idaho and Wyoming.

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