

Capitol LINK

CURRENT ISSUES AFFECTING WISCONSIN AGRICULTURE & AGRI-BUSINESS

March 2008

Legislative Wrap-up: Regular Legislative Session is Adjourned! But Wait... There's More

By Jordan Lamb

The Wisconsin State Legislature adjourned its regular legislative session on Thursday, March 13, but the Legislature has been called into a special legislative session by Governor Doyle to act on “legislation relating to state finances and appropriations.” Specifically, the legislature is considering legislation aimed at **repairing the budget shortfall** that was discovered after the budget bill was enacted last fall. The Assembly approved a Republican substitute to Governor Doyle’s proposed legislation with a vote of 51-46. However, the Senate failed to adopt the Republican’s version. Accordingly, the special session continues as parties attempt to work out a budget repair package that can be approved by both houses.

In addition, the State Senate concluded its business without acting on several **agricultural investment bills**. Assembly Bill 732 would have provided meat processors with a refundable tax credit of up to 10 percent of qualified investments in a taxable year. Assembly Bill 763 would have allowed members of a dairy cooperative to claim the credit for the modernization or expansion expenses paid by the cooperative based on the volume of milk each farmer delivers to the cooperative. Both bills passed the State Assembly in February and were recommended for passage by the Senate Agriculture Committee. However, they were never scheduled for a vote on the Senate floor and now will have to wait until next session when they can be considered again.

The Assembly adjourned without acting on the Senate’s version of the legislation to ratify and implement the **Great Lakes Compact** in Wisconsin. However, Assembly Natural Resources Committee chairperson, Representative Scott Gunderson (R-Waterford) has expressed his intent to continue to work on the bill in the next couple of weeks. It is expected that the Compact legislation will be taken up by the full Assembly in a special legislative session this spring.

Legislation requiring **electricians to be licensed** was signed by Governor Doyle on March 5, 2008. 2007 Wisconsin Act 67 requires individuals and businesses involved in the installation, repair or the maintenance of electrical wiring to obtain a license from the Wisconsin Department of Commerce. (Individuals who perform electrical work on their own residences are exempt from this new licensing requirement.)

Finally, legislation aimed at combating the **feral swine** problem in Wisconsin has been approved by both legislative houses and is now awaiting consideration by Governor Doyle. Assembly Bill 334, would designate feral swine as harmful wild animals makes it illegal to possess, introduce, stock or release feral pigs into the wild. Feral swine can transmit diseases to domestic swine that could irreparably harm individual farms and affect the state’s entire pork industry.

NR Board Approves Air Permitting Extension for Ag Operations

By Jordan Lamb

At their February Board meeting, the Natural Resources Board *approved* the DNR staff's recommendation to extend the implementation deadline for Wisconsin's air permitting rule, NR 445, until July 2011 for emissions associated with agricultural wastes. This decision sets the Wisconsin timeline for implementation of air permitting for farms in line with the conclusion of the federal EPA air monitoring study that is anticipated to provide valuable guidance as to what air emissions issues livestock operations pose.

Ag Nuisance Case is Appealed to the WI Supreme Court

By Jordan Lamb

The group of out-of-state landowners who lost their nuisance lawsuit against a Sawyer County cranberry grower at both the lower court and the appeals court level has now appealed their case to the Wisconsin State Supreme Court. The State of Wisconsin, which had joined the out-of-state landowners in the lower court cases, has announced that the State will *not* participate in this appeal. It is unclear when the Supreme Court will decide whether to take the case, which raises important right-to-farm issues for Wisconsin farmers.

Gary Rohde Appointed to NR Board

By Jordan Lamb

Governor Jim Doyle has appointed Gary Rohde to a six-year term on the Natural Resources Board. Mr. Rohde brings his agricultural experience to this critical appointment for Wisconsin agricultural producers.

Gary Rohde earned his B.S. from the University of Wisconsin-River Falls in Agricultural Education and his M.S. and Ph.D. in Agricultural Economics from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Rhode served as the Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection from 1976-1981. Rohde also served as Dean of the UW-River Falls College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences from 1981-1999. From 1990-2006 Rohde was a member of the Board of Directors of Northwest Farm Credit Services and AgStar financial services. He also served as the interim CEO of the Milk Marketing Board from 2000-2001. During his career, Rohde has served on various boards, including the Governor's Commission on Agriculture (1985), the Governor's Task Force on Biotechnology (1986), and chair of the Livestock Facility Siting Committee (2003-2005). Rohde was born and raised on a dairy farm in Clark County, Wisconsin and he and his wife, Helen, currently live in River Falls.

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