

News from Washington: July 27-31

China Sparks Some Optimism with Large U.S. Corn Purchase

China has made another record-breaking U.S. corn purchase, according to USDA data released Thursday. The sale of 1.937 million metric tons is some much-needed good news for U.S. farmers weathering low prices, reduced demand and high stocks, says Kevin Ross, president of the National Corn Growers Association.

“The recent corn sales that we’ve had there are very encouraging,” Ross said during a Thursday AgTalks webinar. “Things are definitely looking up.”

USDA has announced a series of daily U.S. corn sales to China since late March, the largest of which — until Thursday — was a sale of 1.762 million tons on July 14.

[Read more from Agri-Pulse.](#)

Senate GOP Unveils Coronavirus Relief Package with \$20B in Ag Aid

Senate Republicans unveiled a coronavirus relief package Monday that would give the Agriculture Department broad authority to spend an additional \$20 billion to compensate agricultural producers and processors for the impact of the pandemic.

The money would augment the \$14 billion that USDA now has available to spend in its Commodity Credit Corp. account as a result of the CARES Act, enacted in March.

Another key provision in the legislation, known as the HEALS Act, which is actually a combination of individual measures, would essentially forgive all Paycheck Protection Program loans under \$150,000 without farmers and other borrowers having to prove that they spent the proceeds on allowable expenses.

[Read more from Agri-Pulse.](#)

The Beginning of the End to the China Deal?

President Donald Trump on Thursday issued another veiled threat to the U.S.-China “phase one” trade pact as the relevancy of the deal comes under question with perhaps just months left in the Trump presidency.

Speaking to reporters at the White House, Trump proclaimed that the “phase one” trade deal with China holds far less importance to him now than it did just several months ago.

“The trade deal means less to me now than it did when I made it,” Trump said in a press conference. “When I made it, it was a great deal.”

Remarks like that and actions by the two governments have economists wondering just how secure the deal — and the billions of purchases of American ag goods that go along with it — really might be.

[Read more from Agri-Pulse.](#)

Farm Relief, SNAP Benefits in Play as Aid Talks Heat Up

Congressional and White House negotiators are under pressure to expand the agricultural aid proposed by Senate Republicans and to restrict how the Agriculture Department can spend the money.

A key senator involved in crafting the GOP proposal that was released on Monday said it was written broadly to ensure USDA could cover a wide array of needs, including ethanol producers who saw their market collapse because of the pandemic. The GOP plan would provide USDA with \$20 billion to go with \$14 billion that the department still has available for coronavirus relief from a previous aid bill.

“At the end of the day we’re going to probably be meeting with (Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue) again and get some reassurances that those dollars are going to go to the places we want them to go,” said Arkansas Sen. John Boozman, who is in line to become the top Republican on the Senate Agriculture Committee next year.

[Read more from Agri-Pulse.](#)

USDA Launches New Farmers.gov Features to Help Farmers Hire Workers

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue today announced new features on the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) [Farmers.gov](#) website designed to help facilitate the employment of H-2A workers.

“My mission from the beginning of my time as Secretary was to make USDA the most effective, most efficient, most customer-focused department in the entire federal government – these changes to [Farmers.gov](#) are doing just that. USDA’s goal is to help farmers navigate the complex H-2A program that is administered by Department of Labor, Department of Homeland Security, and the State Department so hiring a farm worker is an easier process,” said Secretary Perdue. “President Trump knows how essential these workers are to our farmers and America’s food supply chain. We will continue working to streamline these and other processes to better serve our customers across the country.”

The primary new H-2A features on Farmers.gov include:

- A real-time dashboard that enables farmers to track the status of their eligible employer application and visa applications for temporary nonimmigrant workers;
- Streamlining the login information so if a farmer has an existing login.gov account they can save multiple applications tracking numbers for quick look-up at any time;
- Enables easy access to the Department of Labor’s (DOL) Foreign Labor Application Gateway (FLAG);
- Allows farmers to track time-sensitive actions taken in the course of Office of Foreign Labor Certification’s (OFLC) adjudication of temporary labor certification applications;
- Allowing for farmers to access all application forms on-line.

All information can be found at www.farmers.gov/manage/h2a.

[Source: USDA](#)

Jacobs, Balderson Join House Ag GOP Roster

The House Ag Committee has added two new Republicans to its ranks.

In a statement, Rep. Mike Conaway, the committee’s top Republican, said Reps. Chris Jacobs and Troy Balderson have joined the ranks of the panel.

“Both understand the importance of supporting our farm families, and I look forward to working alongside Chris and Troy on behalf of rural America,” Conaway, a Texas Republican, said.

Rep. Balderson, R-Ohio, was first sworn into Congress in September 2018 after a special election to fill the seat originally held by former Ohio Rep. Pat Tiberi, who resigned from Congress to take a job

heading the Ohio Business Roundtable. [Balderson describes himself](#) as a “principled conservative” with experience in the Ohio legislature. He also serves on the House committees on Transportation and Infrastructure; Science, Space and Technology; and Small Business.

[Read more from Agri-Pulse.](#)

USDA Investigates Packages of Unsolicited Seeds from China

USDA is aware that people across the country have received suspicious, unsolicited packages of seed that appear to be coming from China. USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is working closely with the Department of Homeland Security’s Customs and Border Protection, other federal agencies, and State departments of agriculture to investigate the situation.

USDA urges anyone who receives an unsolicited package of seeds to immediately contact their [State plant regulatory official](#) or [APHIS State plant health director](#). Please hold onto the seeds and packaging, including the mailing label, until someone from your State department of agriculture or APHIS contacts you with further instructions. Do not plant seeds from unknown origins.

At this time, we don’t have any evidence indicating this is something other than a “brushing scam” where people receive unsolicited items from a seller who then posts false customer reviews to boost sales. USDA is currently collecting seed packages from recipients and will test their contents and determine if they contain anything that could be of concern to U.S. agriculture or the environment.

USDA is committed to preventing the unlawful entry of prohibited seeds and protecting U.S. agriculture from invasive pests and noxious weeds. Visit the [APHIS’ website](#) to learn more about USDA’s efforts to stop agricultural smuggling and promote trade compliance.

[Source: USDA](#)

Additions to Dem Platform Target Farm Chemical Use

Critics of agricultural chemical usage have won new language in the Democratic Party’s proposed 2020 platform that calls for the federal government to ban chlorpyrifos insecticide and provide assistance to farmers to reduce applications of pesticides and chemical fertilizers.

The platform, which must be approved at the party convention next month, also calls for new investments in “research and development to support climate-resilient, sustainable, low-carbon, and organic agricultural methods” and a requirement that public companies disclose climate risks and greenhouse gas emissions in their operations and supply chains.

The party’s platform committee adopted those provisions as amendments on Monday. The platform already included language to achieve ["net-zero" carbon emissions](#) from the ag sector and language supporting renewable fuels.

[Read more from Agri-Pulse.](#)

Biofuels Producers Seek Specific Language In Aid Package

Biofuels groups are concerned about the lack of specifics in the coronavirus assistance proposal put forth by Senate Republicans.

That Senate proposal would provide 20 billion dollars to USDA with broad discretion on how to distribute those funds. Although it mentions “processors” of ag commodities as one of the targeted groups, it does not specify biofuels.

Ron Lamberty with the American Coalition for Ethanol says they would like to see more specific language in the final bill.

“We had been told earlier that if we want money to go to ethanol plants, we should press for clear delineation in these bills that the money is for ethanol producers—for biofuel producers,” Lamberty says. “So people need to be very clear and very loud that that’s what they need. Because I think USDA, last time, didn’t read it the way that we read it.”

[Read more from Brownfield Ag News.](#)