

News from Washington: August 24-28

China corn purchases surge in August

The USDA is reporting yet another large Chinese purchase of U.S. corn, reinforcing assessments that the country's demand for the grain is strong as it tries to rebuild its swine herd.

Chinese companies purchased an additional 747,000 metric tons of U.S. corn for delivery in the 2020-21 marketing year, according to a USDA [daily grain sale](#) report released Thursday. USDA also reported an additional 140,000-ton sale of U.S. corn to "unknown destinations."

"This overnight purchase of three-quarters of a million ton ... shows us that not only is China committed to working as best as they can to fulfill 'phase one' commitments, but it's also telling us that the demand is there and we are an affordable and reliable option," U.S. Grains Council President and CEO Ryan LeGrand told *Agri-Pulse* Thursday. "We're there to supply that demand."

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

Taiwan agrees to ease restrictions on US beef and pork

U.S. government and industry officials are applauding Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-Wen's Friday announcement that the country will be lifting restrictions that limit imports of U.S. beef and pork.

Both the Taiwanese and U.S. government described the announcement as leading to greater economic ties between the two countries.

"We look forward to the timely implementation of these actions, which will provide greater access for U.S. farmers to one of East Asia's most vibrant markets, and for Taiwan consumers to high-quality U.S. agricultural products," the State Department [said](#) Friday. "President Tsai's vision and leadership in removing these long-standing barriers open the door to greater economic and trade cooperation between the United States and Taiwan."

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

Trump Administration Announces Additional \$1 billion for the Farmers to Families Food Box Program

President Donald J. Trump and U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue announced up to an additional \$1 billion for the [Farmers to Families Food Box Program](#). The additional funding allows the program to continue critical support to farmers, distributors, and American families in need. The Farmers to Families Food Box program has provided over 70 million boxes to hungry Americans across the country.

"I'm so proud of the people of USDA for designing this program in record time. With this additional up to \$1 billion in funding, the Farmers to Families Food Box Program will continue to save countless jobs, support our farmers and move food to where it's needed most," said Secretary Perdue. "As the President said, when a food box is delivered to a family, we show them that in this country no one is forgotten."

In a [Fayetteville Observer op-ed](#), Advisor to the President Ivanka Trump said, "As we work to achieve the Great American Comeback, The President and his Administration have stabilized our American food supply chain and protected our Nation's families, farmers and ranchers...We are proud of the

profound effect the Farmers to Families Food Box Program has had by keeping our farmers in business, empowering the food distribution industry workforce, and providing for those most in need.”

[Read more from USDA.](#)

Hurricane Laura not seen as threat to corn/bean exports

The head of the Soy Transportation Coalition says Hurricane Laura does not look to be a threat to soybean and corn exports on the lower Mississippi River.

Mike Steenhoek tells Brownfield Ag News the main path of Laura is between Houston and New Orleans with Lake Charles, Louisiana the main target, on the border of Texas and Louisiana, “Much more favorable that if it were to hit New Orleans more directly because 60% of U.S. soybean exports leave from export terminals near New Orleans. Fifty-nine percent of corn exports. So, that’s by far the number-one launching point for both commodities.”

Steenhoek says wheat exports might be affected by the hurricane out of the area known as the “Texas Gulf” on that Texas/Louisiana border. He says 23% of U.S. wheat exports go through there.

He says they’ll be watching closely for wind damage and any infrastructure damage that could occur along the Mississippi River.

[Source: Brownfield Ag News](#)

COVID-19 continues to challenge food industry

Executives with some top food companies say they continue to face challenges in meeting consumer demand while keeping their employees healthy and plants staffed up during the pandemic.

Speaking on a Consumer Brands Association webinar, Richard Carlson, vice president of quality management for Hormel Foods, said one of the challenges the meat processor faces is training employees to continue social distancing when they’re off the job. (Hormel posts its training materials for workers on a special website, [keepcovidout.org](https://www.keepcovidout.org).)

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

EPA head discusses RVO process

EPA administrator Andrew Wheeler says his agency is working on the 2021 RVOs—Renewable Volume Obligations—for biofuels.

“This has been a very unusual year as far as the vehicle miles traveled. The driving has been down. The COVID response has had a negative impact on both the corn growers as well as the refiners,” Wheeler says. “We have ongoing conversations with both USDA and the Department of Energy, and we hope to have the RVOs out as soon as we can.”

EPA is tasked, under the RFS, with setting the volume requirements by November 30th of each year. Wheeler made his comments during a conference call with media. He was also asked where the agency is at on the issue of gap year SRE waivers. Wheeler said they have started looking at them but did not offer a timeline for a decision.

Many ag and biofuels groups are urging EPA to reject the waiver requests.

[Source: Brownfield Ag News](#)

EPA and USDA announce competition to advance agricultural sustainability in the U.S.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced the Next Gen Fertilizer Challenges, a joint EPA-USDA partnership and competition to advance agricultural sustainability in the United States. The competition includes two challenges that seek proposals for new and existing fertilizer technologies to maintain or improve crop yields while reducing the impacts of fertilizers on the environment.

“The shared goal here is to accelerate the development of next generation fertilizers for corn production that can either maintain or increase crop yields while reducing environmental impacts to our air, land, and water,” said EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler.

“USDA is committed to encouraging the development of new technologies and practices to ensure that U.S. agriculture is socially, environmentally, and economically sustainable for years to come,” said U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue. “This challenge will stimulate innovation and aligns with USDA’s Agriculture Innovation Agenda announced earlier this year.”

[Read more from USDA.](#)

Midwest shaping up as key for Trump

The conventions are now over, and one thing seems pretty clear: Two or three battleground Midwest states could decide the presidential election.

As the electoral map stands now, President Donald Trump needs to hold Iowa and will likely need to win Wisconsin again, or possibly Minnesota, (both have 10 electoral votes) to have a path to the 270 that he needs to win re-election. It was no accident that there were a number of speakers at the Republican convention from both Wisconsin and Minnesota talking up his trade policy and regulatory rollbacks.

Trump made clear in his acceptance speech from the White House lawn Thursday night that he’s going to keep hitting Biden hard on trade and China. “For 47 years, Joe Biden took the donations of blue collar workers, gave them hugs and even kisses, and told them he felt their pain – and then he flew back to Washington and voted to ship their jobs to China and many other distant lands,” Trump said.

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

Former Ag secretary breaks with GOP, endorses Biden

Former Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman is one of more than 200 alumni of the George W. Bush administration who signed a statement released Thursday endorsing Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden.

Veneman served during Bush’s first term from 2001 to 2005 and then became executive director of UNICEF, the United Nations Children’s Fund. She had previously held several senior positions at USDA during the Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations, rising to deputy secretary in 1991. She served as California’s Food and Agriculture secretary from 1995 to 1999.

The [statement](#) raises concerns about President Donald Trump’s character and policies, accuses him of mismanaging the COVID-19 crisis and says the nation has “lost our moral compass,” citing the policy of separating children from asylum-seeking parents.

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