

News from Washington: September 14-18

USDA to Provide Additional Direct Assistance to Farmers and Ranchers Impacted by the Coronavirus

President Donald J. Trump and U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue today announced up to an additional \$14 billion dollars for agricultural producers who continue to face market disruptions and associated costs because of COVID-19. Signup for the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP 2) will begin September 21st and run through December 11, 2020.

"America's agriculture communities are resilient, but still face many challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. President Trump is once again demonstrating his commitment to ensure America's farmers and ranchers remain in business to produce the food, fuel, and fiber America needs to thrive," said Secretary Perdue. "We listened to feedback received from farmers, ranchers and agricultural organizations about the impact of the pandemic on our nations' farms and ranches, and we developed a program to better meet the needs of those impacted."

[Read more from USDA.](#)

Trump Announces Second Round of CFAP Payments

President Donald Trump, speaking at a campaign rally Thursday night in Wisconsin, announced that the administration would distribute about \$13 billion in additional payments under the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program, starting next week.

[USDA on Friday released the rules for the new round of CFAP payments.](#) Commodities that will be eligible for CFAP-2 payments include wine grapes, goats, bison, mohair, tobacco, hemp, mink and three classes of wheat: soft red winter, hard red winter, and white.

"Starting next week my administration is committing an additional — you've been asking for this for a long time — \$13 billion in relief to help farmers recover" from the COVID-19 pandemic, Trump said at the airport rally.

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

US Soy Sales to China Heat Up in New Marketing Year

Exports of U.S. soybeans to China started off the new 2020-21 marketing year strong, and the latest USDA weekly sales data show the pace of trade is heating up.

USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service is reporting export sales of about 2.5 million metric tons for the week of Sept. 4-10, with most of that — about 1.5 million tons — going to Chinese buyers. Perhaps even stronger evidence that China's efforts to rebuild its swine herd are fueling the country's demand for soybeans is the new data on physical exports.

The USDA is reporting about 1.7 million tons of soybean exports in the seven-day period, and again China is the biggest destination. The U.S. shipped roughly 1.1 million tons of soybeans to China in the first full week of the 2020-21 marketing year, which began Sept. 1. In a distant second place was Egypt, with imports of 113,100 tons.

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

WTO Panel Rules Against US tariffs on China

A World Trade Organization panel ruled Tuesday that the U.S. broke its international commitments by circumventing the WTO dispute system and hitting China in 2018 with tariffs on \$234 billion worth of its goods.

The decision evoked a strong rebuke from the Trump administration, but the Chinese case is not expected to have any real impact on the dispute with the U.S. That's because the WTO's appellate court is effectively shut down – a result of the continued refusal by the U.S. to approve new appointments.

All the U.S. has to do now is appeal the ruling to send the case into limbo, said Veronica Nigh, an economist with the American Farm Bureau Federation.

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

EPA Says It's Denying "Gap" Waivers

The EPA has just announced it is denying "gap year" petitions for small refinery exemptions. Ethanol and corn groups have been urging the administration to do just that.

The EPA says it is moving forward to review petitions for other small refinery exemptions under the Renewable Fuel Standard.

The "gap-filling" petitions that had been submitted were for the 2011 through 2018 compliance years.

[Source: Brownfield Ag News](#)

Senators Weigh New Clean Water Act Rule

A prominent Iowa farmer is telling [a Senate committee today](#) that the Trump administration's new rule re-defining the reach of federal water pollution regulations is providing "clarity, certainty" and a "common sense" approach to farmers.

The new Navigable Waters Protection Rule replaced the Obama-era "waters of the United States," or WOTUS, rule that had increased the number of wetlands and other areas under the jurisdiction of the Clean Water Act.

In his prepared testimony, Ray Gaesser says that the WOTUS rule "threatened my farm with jaw-dropping penalties and even criminal prosecution for plowing or spraying a 'water of the U.S.' But it was so broad and vague that under the "water of the U.S." definition, most any land where water sometimes flowed or ponded after a rain, would be regulated by the federal government."

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

US Braces for New Organic Food Fight with EU

The U.S. is willing to negotiate a new deal on organic standards with the European Union, but the outcome for an agreement in the years to come is uncertain. The EU has set a deadline of Dec. 31, 2025, for a new deal, but it's still far from clear what exactly will be demanded of the U.S.

It took three years for the U.S. and the EU to come to a complex pact in 2012 that allows organic food and farming practices to be considered as equal on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, but the EU is overhauling its approach to organics, and this time its setting the bar higher for equivalency agreements.

The first time around required the USDA and the European Commission to sign off on the deal, but now the EU wants much more, says Miles McEvoy, who led the negotiations on the U.S. side that produced the 2012 deal.

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

USDA Won't Budge on Organic Animal Standards

USDA has reaffirmed its decision not to implement new animal welfare standards for organic farms despite multiple flaws made in the department's analysis of an Obama-era rule.

The Agricultural Marketing Service says in a [final decision](#) published in today's Federal Register that two regulatory impact analyses on the Organic Livestock and Poultry Practices Rule, including one prepared to justify its 2018 withdrawal, contained errors.

Laura Batcha, the [Organic Trade Association's](#) CEO and president, said "organic standards should be allowed to advance, and not be held back by blatant inaccuracies on the part of USDA." Referring to the federal judge that [ordered](#) USDA to explain its analysis, Batcha said her group "urges the court to move quickly and rule in its favor on its organic livestock welfare lawsuit."

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

Biden, Trump Cast Sharply Different Visions for Biofuels

President Donald Trump and former Vice President Joe Biden both promise to increase usage of biofuels, but Trump is focused on expanding the market for conventional ethanol while Biden is prioritizing next-generation products that align more closely with his climate goals.

In his administration's policy decisions and his campaign's promises, Trump has focused on increasing the sale of conventional biofuels by easing restrictions on their distribution and subsidizing blender pumps and other infrastructure needs.

In recent days, the Environmental Protection Agency [has denied 54 retroactive refinery waivers to corn ethanol usage requirements](#), and Trump announced that his administration would allow gasoline retailers to distribute E15, gasoline that contains 15% ethanol, in conventional pumps pending state approval.

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

USDA Assists Farmers, Ranchers, and Communities Affected by Western Wildfires

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today announced the availability of assistance for residents and agricultural producers affected by recent wildfires.

As of today, wildfires have burned nearly 6.9 million acres across 11 states. More than 31,000 personnel from the local, state and federal levels are working to contain 61 large fires. The USDA Forest Service has more than 7,800 personnel committed to firefighting efforts along with airtankers, helicopters, and other air and ground firefighting resources.

[Read more from USDA.](#)

Federal Government Fines Smithfield Plant for COVID

The federal government has fined the Smithfield pork processing plant in Sioux Falls, South Dakota for COVID-19 related violations.

OSHA, part of the U.S. Labor Department, says Smithfield failed to protect its employees from the coronavirus. The \$13-thousand-500-dollar fine is the maximum allowed by law.

The [United Food and Commercial Workers International Union](#) calls the fine “completely insufficient” and blames the Trump administration for the “slap on the wrist” for Smithfield. The union calls the fine a “slap in the face” to meatpacking workers.

More than 12-hundred Smithfield workers at the plant tested positive for the virus and four died.

[Read more from Brownfield Ag News](#)