

News from Washington: September 21-25

Nations Raise Concern Over US Farm Subsidies at WTO

A former chief economist for USDA, Joe Glauber, [warned recently](#) that the billions of dollars in payments to farmers to offset trade wars and COVID-19 impacts would “attract attention” on an international level. And that’s exactly what’s happening.

Canada, the European Union, India, Australia, Brazil, Paraguay, New Zealand, Uruguay, Paraguay and Colombia all raised concerns of international market distortion Wednesday at the World Trade Organization. The countries asked the U.S. to explain the roughly \$34 billion in what they consider trade-distorting payments in 2019. The WTO cap for those “amber box” subsidies is \$19.1 billion.

[USDA announced last week](#) a new \$14 billion round of coronavirus relief payments, and that was also brought up in the WTO meeting.

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

Farm Groups to USTR: WTO Critical for US Ag Exports

U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer recently called the World Trade Organization “a mess,” but some of the largest U.S. agricultural groups and companies are speaking out in a new letter to stress the importance of the WTO to American farmers.

President Donald Trump has threatened to pull the U.S. out of the WTO, but it was a resolution introduced by Missouri GOP Sen. Josh Hawley to withdraw from the organization that provided one of the biggest motivations for the letter, an ag industry source tells *Agri-Pulse*. Hawley's May 7 [resolution](#) complained that China was using the WTO to hurt American businesses.

The WTO's rules and its system for dispute resolution have been critical to growth in international trade for food and agriculture, the American Farm Bureau Federation, National Grain and Feed Association, National Milk Producers Federation, North American Meat Institute, Cargill, Syngenta, the Hershey Company and others wrote to Lighthizer [in a letter](#) that was also dispatched to lawmakers.

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

For Second Time, Democrats Relent on USDA Funding

For the second straight year, Democrats threatened but ultimately backed down from blocking Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue from getting a fresh pot of money to make payments to farmers this fall.

Despite warnings from farm groups that USDA was close to running out of money in the Commodity Credit Corp. account, House Democrats [released a stopgap funding bill on Monday](#) that didn't include a replenishment of the CCC, charging that the Trump administration was using the account as a “political slush fund” to help the president's re-election bid in farm states.

But House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, facing appeals from some members of her own caucus, [announced a deal](#) with congressional Republicans and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin Tuesday evening to refill the CCC in exchange for prohibiting the use of CCC funds for oil company assistance and extending some pandemic-related nutrition assistance.

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

ANALYST SAYS GOVERNMENT AID COULD PLAY LARGER PART IN POST-COVID AG LANDSCAPE

An analyst with Rabo AgriFinance suggests government payments will be more of a factor as farmers navigate a post-COVID-19 landscape.

Steve Nicholson says prices over the last 10 to 15 years have been mostly profitable, so the government has not had to intervene.

“Now that the government is, farmers are going to have to be more conscious of that, also understand what his payments are going to be, and make sure he understands that in the context of his income statement.”

During a webinar Tuesday, he said that will have implications on ag bankers as well.

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

Trump vs Biden on Trade: A Decision Between Tariffs or Allies

President Donald Trump famously tweeted that trade wars “are good and easy to win.” It was a brash statement, but emblematic of his first term in which he either threatened or hit trade partners like China, Japan, South Korea, Mexico, Canada and the European Union with tariffs.

The process, while opening up U.S. farmers to retaliation, has resulted in major wins for increased trade, the Trump administration argues. Former Vice President Joe Biden strenuously disagrees and is emphasizing how he would not ostracize some of the country's most reliable trading partners.

Now voters are being asked to choose between incumbent Trump, who renegotiated the North American Free Trade Agreement, and Biden, who promises to be less dependent on tariffs and rely more heavily on traditional allies to take on China.

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

Lawmakers Told to use Stimulus to Legalize Workers

House Democrats are using the coronavirus pandemic to make the case that farmworkers and other essential workers who are undocumented should get legal status.

Tom Jawetz, vice president of immigration policy at the Center for American Progress, a liberal think tank, told the House Judiciary subcommittee on Wednesday that the next Congress should use an economic stimulus bill to provide a path to legal status for undocumented workers. Those workers “will be essential to rebuilding our economy,” he said.

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

Roberts: Food Insecurity is a National Security Issue

Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Pat Roberts says there’s no greater threat to national security than food insecurity.

“As COVID-19 has demonstrated, if any singular component in that food supply chain is vulnerable or harmed— the seeds, plants, feed, animals, workers, or infrastructure— significant challenges can result and have resulted,” he says.

The Kansas Republican says despite the coronavirus-related disruptions, he's hopeful about the future of the industry.

"I'm optimistic we will come out of this stronger than ever before," he says. "We must commit to work together to ensure that we continue to build a vibrant, safe and secure future for our generations to come."

Roberts spoke during the Agri-Pulse ag and food policy summit.

[Source: Brownfield Ag News](#)

EPA: No Significant Risk to Children from Chlorpyrifos

A new risk assessment from EPA concludes there are no risks of concern to children's health from chlorpyrifos, an organophosphate insecticide that environmental and farmworker groups have been trying to get off the market for years.

"There are no residential post-application risk estimates of concern for adults or children with or without" a federal ten-fold safety factor to protect children, EPA said in its draft [human health risk assessment](#).

That assessment was criticized by the environmental law firm [Earthjustice](#), which said EPA was ignoring decades of science showing chlorpyrifos permanently harms children's brains.

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

Farm Groups Backing Bayer in Roundup Case

Bayer is getting help in its appeal of the first verdict in the Roundup cancer trials, where a jury found that Monsanto (since bought by Bayer) had acted with "malice and oppression" in failing to warn a California school groundskeeper of the dangers of using the weedkiller.

Both [CropLife America](#) and the [California Farm Bureau Federation](#) have filed letters backing the company in its appeal to the California Supreme Court.

An appeals court in July mostly ruled against Bayer, finding that federal pesticide law did not pre-empt Johnson's state law claims, now a key issue before the state's highest court. It also said in its view, Dewayne Johnson "presented abundant — and certainly substantial — evidence that glyphosate, together with the other ingredients in Roundup products, caused his cancer."

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

South Korea Close to Filling Quota Pledge for US Rice

South Korea, in a [deal struck](#) with the Trump administration last November, agreed to buy at least 132,304 metric tons of U.S. rice annually, and the country is getting close to meeting that promise for 2020 according to U.S. government and industry officials.

South Korea, in a new tender completed Wednesday night, purchased 96,671 metric tons of U.S. rice — all of it California medium grain — worth about \$90 million, according to the USA Rice Federation. That puts the total amount of U.S. rice purchased by South Korea this year at 110,704 metric tons.

It also puts South Korea in arm's reach of fulfilling the country-specific-quota (CSQ) that the government agreed to last year. Another South Korean tender for U.S. rice is planned, but a date has not yet been set, says USA Rice spokesman Michael Klein.

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

USDA Extends WIC COVID-19 Flexibilities for Duration of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today announced the extension of more than a dozen flexibilities ensuring participants in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) continue receiving the food and health support they need during the COVID-19 pandemic. USDA's proactive extension of these waivers throughout the national public health emergency will ensure nutritionally at-risk mothers, babies, and children receive the critical nutrition benefits and services they count on in a safe manner while allowing the program to operate based on local conditions throughout the pandemic.

"USDA has been extremely steadfast in offering flexibilities to ensure Americans in need continue to receive food assistance during COVID-19. President Trump has demonstrated his commitment to supporting Americans in need during the pandemic and setting them up for success as our nation reopens and recovers," **said Secretary Sonny Perdue**. "WIC provides vital services to new and expectant mothers, infants, and children and we are committed to making it as easy as possible for them to receive the support they need during the pandemic."

[Read more from USDA.](#)

Perdue Signals End to Food Boxes, Return to Normal in USDA Hunger Efforts

USDA's Farmers to Families Food Box program needs to eventually give way to more established government nutrition practices, Ag Secretary Sonny Perdue told a virtual gathering of the nation's produce farmers Tuesday.

The \$4 billion initiative has been one of the most tangible representations of the Trump administration's efforts to feed hungry people during the coronavirus pandemic, and there was interest — particularly on the part of the United Fresh Produce Association, which Perdue was addressing — in making the boxes a long-term part of the nation's food policy.

Perdue has traveled around the country in recent months, often flanked by other administration officials including President Donald Trump or White House adviser Ivanka Trump, taking part in food box distribution events. He said the program has been "a blessing to participate in," but should eventually give way to the protocols that were in place prior to the coronavirus pandemic.

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