

Cultivator

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Vilsack Withdraws Beef Checkoff Plan

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Tom Vilsack announced Dec. 18 he will not move forward with plans to start a second national beef checkoff program.

The announcement came after Congress passed a fiscal 2015 omnibus bill recommending USDA not spend money on a second beef checkoff.

"This is a great victory and a testament to the influence and effectiveness of Federation members," said Alabama Farmers Federation Beef Division Director Nate Jaeger. "Farmers in Alabama engaged in this issue at the county, state, regional and national levels. They wanted to prevent this top-down approach by USDA for beef promotion, research and education, and Secretary Vilsack responded appropriately."

Vilsack presented the plan for a second beef checkoff in the fall of 2014. Since then, Federation President Jimmy Parnell and the Federation's State Beef Committee joined numerous agriculture organizations in asking Vilsack to withdraw the proposal.

A beef industry working group has discussed possible changes to the current national beef checkoff program for the past three years without resolution. However, working group members agreed to oppose Vilsack's plan. Vilsack said he hopes the group can build on this foundation and present recommendations to improve the beef checkoff.

Federation policy supports the current national beef checkoff and increasing the amount collected.



Row crop farmers like Dale County Farmers Federation President Chris Carroll, above, may benefit from attending one of nine educational farm bill meetings across Alabama this month.

Additional Farm Bill Training Available

The Alabama Farmers Federation and the Alabama Cooperative Extension System are hosting nine farm bill educational meetings in January.

Computers will be available for attendees to work with Extension and Farm Service Agency professionals on applying for programs.

"Unlike the December meetings, these workshops will guide attendees through online tools to make informed

choices about their options," said Federation Cotton, Soybeans and Wheat & Feed Grains Divisions Director Carla Hornady.

Meetings start at 10 a.m. with a farm bill overview. At 1 p.m., attendees will work in the computer lab.

Farmers may register for the morning session, afternoon session or both by calling the host facility. They should also fill out the crop information work sheet available online at AlabamaFarmBill.com.

Farm Bill Meetings

- **Jan. 13** – Baldwin County Extension Office, Bay Minette, (251) 937-7176
- **Jan. 14** – Wiregrass Research & Extension Center, Headland, (334) 693-2363
- **Jan. 21** – Monroe County Extension Office, Monroeville, (251) 575-3477
- **Jan. 22** – E.V. Smith Research & Extension Center, Shorter, (334) 727-7403
- **Jan. 23** – Lee County Extension Office, Opelika, (334) 749-3353
- **Jan. 26** – Sand Mountain Research & Extension Center, Crossville, (256) 528-7133
- **Jan. 27** – Black Belt Experiment Station, Marion Junction, (334) 872-7878
- **Jan. 28** – Morgan County Extension Office, Hartselle, (256) 773-2549
- **Jan. 30** – Lawrence County Extension Office, Moulton, (256) 974-2464

Congress Acts To Extend Tax Provisions For 2014

A bill extending more than 50 tax provisions that expired at the end of 2013, including several used by farmers, became law Dec. 19.

"We are relieved Congress finally acted to extend these tax provisions to cover the 2014 tax year," said Alabama Farmers Federation National Legislative Programs Director Mitt Walker. "While farmers hoped a multi-year extension would be approved, passage of this bill is welcome news as farmers begin work on their 2014 tax returns."

Among other provisions, the so-called tax-extenders bill, H.R. 5771, includes an extension of Section 179 small business expensing and bonus depreciation.

The Section 179 provision keeps the expensing limit at \$500,000 for this year, which is the same it's been since 2010. Without the extension, it would revert to \$25,000. The bill also reinstates 50 percent bonus depreciation for new capital purchases, including farm equipment.

"These provisions increase cash flow and allow farmers to reinvest in their operations, which benefits local communities and the overall economy," Walker said. "We look forward to working with the 114th Congress to pass a longer-term extension of these provisions and others important to families and businesses."

The bill included tax incentives for wind energy and biofuels, including the \$1-a-gallon credit subsidizing biodiesel.

Upcoming Events and Deadlines

- **Jan. 15** - Application deadline for the 2015 Outstanding Young Farm Family contest. Visit AlfaYoungFarmers.org for more information.
- **Jan. 19** - Inauguration Parade on Dexter Ave. in Montgomery following the swearing-in ceremony at 9 a.m.
- **Jan. 27** - Registration deadline for the Alabama Farmers Federation Young Farmers Conference Feb. 27 - March 1 in Montgomery. Visit events.signup4.com/2015AlfaYoungFarmer for details.
- **Jan. 30** - Application deadline for Alabama's Farm of Distinction contest. Find more information at AlabamaFarmCity.org.
- **Feb. 1** - Application deadline for Alabama Farmers Agriculture Foundation \$1,750 college scholarships. Find details online at AlfaFarmers.org/About/Forms.
- **Feb. 3-5** - Federation Commodity Organizational Conference at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Montgomery. Additional information is available online at tinyurl.com/2015CommOrg.
- **Feb. 12** - Alabama Peanut Producers Association Annual Meeting and Trade Show in Dothan. Visit AlPeanuts.com for details.

Cleburne County Members Meet Legislator



Cleburne County Farmers Federation members met with their newly elected State Rep. Bob Fincher, R-Woodland, Dec. 30 in Heflin. Fincher represents Randolph County and parts of Chambers and Cleburne counties. From left are county Secretary-Treasurer Gene Harris, Fincher and county Vice President and FarmPAC representative Jimmy Jimmerson.

Disaster Coverage Available For Specialty Crops

Fruit, vegetable and other specialty crop growers now have additional disaster coverage options under the new farm bill through the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP).

Previously, the program offered coverage at 55 percent of the average market price for crop losses that exceed 50 percent of expected production. Farmers can now choose higher levels of coverage, up to 65 percent of their expected production at 100 percent of the average market price.

Specialty crops covered include vegetables, fruits, floriculture, ornamental nursery, aquaculture, turf grass, honey, syrup and energy crops, among others.

Application deadlines vary by commodity. If the application deadline for an eligible crop has passed, producers will have until Jan. 14 to choose expanded coverage through NAP.

Farmers can determine NAP eligibility online at fsa.usapas.com/NAP.aspx or by contacting a local Farm Service Agency office.

Four Counties Declared Natural Disaster Areas

Drought conditions during harvest season caused the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to designate Clay, Coosa, Randolph and Tallapoosa counties as primary natural disaster areas.

Farmers in these counties may apply for low-interest emergency (EM) loans to cover part of actual losses attributed to drought. Affected farmers have eight months from the declaration date of Nov. 26 to apply at local USDA Farm Service Agency offices.

Farmers in contiguous counties are also eligible for the EM loans. Those are Chambers, Chilton, Cleburne, Elmore, Lee, Macon, Shelby and Talladega counties.

Visit disaster.fsa.usda.gov for more information.

State Law Enforcement Agencies Consolidated

The Alabama Law Enforcement Agency (ALEA) consolidated 22 state law enforcement agencies into 12 before the Jan. 1 deadline.

As part of the realignment, Agricultural and Rural Crimes Unit (ARCU) Chief Gene Wiggins was named commander of the newly formed State Bureau of Investigations.

"As ARCU chief, I witnessed first-hand how statewide investigations can become more effective by collaborating at the state level and with our local and federal partners," Wiggins said.

ARCU agent Jay Whitehead will replace Wiggins as ARCU chief.

Since the unit was created in June 2013, ARCU has investigated more than 100 cases and recovered more than \$2 million in stolen property.

To report rural crime or suspicious activity, visit arcu.alabama.gov or call 855-75-CRIME.

Auburn Ag Hall of Honor Event Is Feb. 5

Auburn University's Agricultural Alumni Association will induct three members into its prestigious Hall of Honor Feb. 5 during a banquet at the Auburn Marriott Opelika Hotel and Conference Center.

This year's recipients are Eric Cates of Greenville, Milborn Chesser of Fyffe and A.W. "Buck" Compton of Nanafalia.

Cates still farms land that's been in his family since 1818. As a former state representative, he sponsored current-use property tax valuation legislation.

Chesser is a retired poultry farmer who helped found the Bank of Fyffe, now Horizon Bank. He served for more than two decades as secretary-treasurer of the Alabama Farmers Federation.

Compton owns one of the South's largest Charolais cattle herds and is a former Alabama Cattlemen's Association president.

The Pioneer Award will also be presented posthumously to the families of William Dumas and Claude Moore, both of Auburn and former professors.

Dumas was known for his tillage, weed control and insecticide research. Moore taught poultry science and was a leading poultry geneticist in the '80s.

Young Farmers Spread Christmas Cheer



The Crenshaw County Young Farmers provided toys, clothing and necessities for two children through the "Operation Santa Claus" program in December. From left are committee members Jessica Jones, Justin Ray, Paige Ray, Miles Ray, Nikki Hilburn and Christopher Hilburn.

Commodity Corner

Catfish

The Catfish Checkoff Referendum is Jan. 22. The State Catfish Committee encourages members to vote "yes" on continuing the checkoff at an increased rate of \$1 per ton of feed sold in Alabama. The additional funds will go to research programs to help fight diseases like *Aeromonas*. For a list of polling locations, visit tinyurl.com/CatfishPoll15.

-Rick Oates, division director

Cotton

The 2015 Cotton Expo is Feb. 6 at the National Peanut Festival Fairgrounds in Dothan. Topics will include variety selection, producing high-yielding cotton, drones, insect control and more.

-Carla Hornady, division director

Hay & Forage

Adequate rains over the holiday season were a welcome sight as many winter annuals were behind schedule due to dry weather. Through November, the National Agriculture Statistics Service rated only about 30 percent of Alabama pasture as good to excellent. This should keep demand for quality hay moderately high through the first quarter. Growers who improved soil fertility in 2014 should have experienced higher forage performance in what was a dry fall.

-Nate Jaeger, division director

Bee & Honey; Horticulture

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently released the 2013 Pesticide Data Program (PDP) Annual Summary. The report confirms that, overall, pesticide chemical residues on food are lower than the tolerance established by the Environmental Protection Agency and do not pose a safety concern.

-Mac Higginbotham, divisions director

Poultry

The December 2014 Livestock, Dairy and Poultry outlook reported a 1.5 percent increase in broiler meat production for the first 10 months of 2014 over the same time period in 2013. The increase can be attributed to higher liveweights at slaughter. Broiler production companies are expected to continue expansion due to a favorable market and lower feed prices for 2015.

-Guy Hall, division director

Peanuts

With the 2014 peanut harvest complete, farmers are reflecting on a mixed year for yields and grades. Alabama Extension peanut agronomist Kris Balkcom estimated around 10 percent of the state's crop was "just terrible." Farmers are now considering ways to overcome the bad crop and plan for the new farm bill.

-Jim Cravey, division director

Century And Heritage Farm



Conecuh County farmer Wayne Thames, right, accepted Century Farm and Heritage Farm awards from Amy Belcher of the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries during the Conecuh County Farm-City Luncheon in Evergreen Dec. 2. The programs recognize family farms with significant historical value in Alabama.



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New "Simply Southern" TV Show Premieres

The Alabama Farmers Federation and Alabama Farmers Cooperative (AFC) launched a new statewide television show Jan. 4 focused on agriculture, gardening, rural lifestyles and rural youth programs.

The first episode of "Simply Southern" featured stories on Birmingham's Vulcan Park and Museum; the Mobile Dairy Classroom; the Federation's 2014 Outstanding Young Farm Family, Paul and Vicki Morrison of Dale County; and a cooking segment with Sidney Phelps of Bonnie Plants.

The show airs Sunday mornings at 6 a.m. on WBMA in Birmingham, WAFF in Huntsville, WSFA in Montgomery and WTVY in Dothan. It airs at 6:30 a.m. on WKRK in Mobile and WTVM in Columbus, Georgia.

The Jan. 11 show will feature Dickie Odom's Greene County shrimp farm, Peinhardt Living History Farm and Rock Bridge Canyon Equestrian Park.

For more information, "like" the Simply Southern Facebook page.

Autauga County Farm Safety Day



More than 600 third-grade students in Autauga County attended the Farm Safety Day sponsored by Extension at the county's Agricultural Center in Autaugaville Dec. 11. Autauga County Farmers Federation and Young Farmers committee members volunteered to teach students about Alabama-grown commodities and how to stay safe in a variety of situations. Above, Alabama Cooperative Extension specialist David Cline, right, gives participants an up-close look at an Alabama catfish.