

Cultivator

www.AlfaFarmers.org • News from the Alabama Farmers Federation

Congress To EPA: Ditch Water Rule

Alabama's congressional delegation has joined 224 other Congressmen in opposing a proposed Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) rule expanding water regulations.

The proposal seeks to expand the definition of "waters of the U.S." to include previously unregulated waters and dry land, including ponds, ditches and puddles.

Republican members of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, including U.S. Sen. Jeff Sessions of Alabama, sent a similar letter to President Barack Obama in April.

"The actions of our congressional delegation show our elected representatives understand the dire implications of giving the EPA expanded jurisdiction," said Alabama Farmers Federation National Legislative Programs Director Mitt Walker. "This is a bad rule, and it would add more expense and frustration for farmers who deal with too many federal rules as it is."

According to the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF), the proposal could require farmers to have federal permits to build a fence across a ditch, apply fertilizer and pesticides or perform other activities in previously unregulated areas. Ultimately, the EPA would have the authority to prevent a farmer's regular operations based on an ambiguous definition of a water.

The rule is open for public comments through July 21. To submit a comment, visit AlfaFarmers.org, and click on the Legislative Action Center.



Baldwin County farmer Joel Sirmon looks across a flooded field of sweet potatoes. Sirmon said planting peanuts and cotton was delayed because of wet fields. According to the National Weather Service, annual rainfall in Mobile through April was 10 inches above normal.

Severe Weather Affects Alabama Farms

Alabama farmers are cleaning up and drying out after back-to-back storm systems brought tornadoes and heavy rains to the state April 28-30.

Alfa Insurance received over 2,300 claims from the storms, including reports of poultry houses damaged or destroyed by tornadoes in north Alabama. In south Alabama, flooding created planting delays for farmers.

"This is the third real heavy rain we've had this year," said Joel Sirmon, who farms in Baldwin County. "We're supposed to be planting peanuts and cotton right now, but it's too wet for that."

Sirmon said he had only planted sweet potatoes and corn so far, and he had 10 acres of fields under up to a foot of water after the last rain.

Mobile County Farmers Federation board member Bert Driskell said he is normally finished planting corn by May, but this year, he had less than half planted.

"We're at a dead standstill again," Driskell said last week. "We can't get into the fields to do anything."

The story was similar across south Alabama, from Washington County, where farmer Walt Richardson had 10 acres of corn underwater, to Henry County, where farmer Thomas Adams had fields filled with standing water.

"Everything we've planted seems to be holding up well, but we keep getting farther behind," said Adams, Henry County Farmers Federation president. "We are blessed to have missed the high winds and tornadoes."

The Mobile National Weather Service (NWS) officially reported a record 11.24 inches of rain April 29 at the regional airport.

NWS storm surveys reported 18 tornadoes struck Alabama April 29, including at least four rated EF-3 with winds up to 160 miles an hour.

Federal Officials Tour Feral Swine Damage



Kevin Shea, left, administrator of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), toured feral swine damage at Autauga County farms April 15. Above, Shea visits with farmers Levi and Dan Gaines and former Alabama Wildlife Services Director Frank Boyd around a new hog trap on the Gaines' farm.

Commodity Corner

Hay & Forage

Farm Service Agency offices are accepting applications for the Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFP) and Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) for losses occurring from Oct. 1, 2011, to Dec. 1, 2014. The deadline is Jan. 30, 2015.

-Nate Jaeger, division director

Poultry, Pork

Propane industry officials are concerned increased exports and logistical issues may strain supply and increase prices again this winter. Farmers are encouraged to develop a plan with their suppliers. Farmers may improve energy efficiency by increasing sidewall and ceiling insulation in houses; checking tanks and lines for leaks; converting to natural gas; installing stir fans; using more litter amendments; and installing larger on-farm propane storage tanks. Read the June issue of *Neighbors* for more.

-Guy Hall, divisions director

Soybeans

The Alabama Soybean Producers will promote the industry with soybean themed T-shirts for students at the State FFA Convention June 3-6. They will also donate crayons and soybean science kits to the Alabama Ag in the Classroom Summer Institute June 11-13.

-Carla Hornady, division director

Forestry, Wildlife

Financial assistance is available to help non-industrial forest landowners protect pine stands from beetles. Applications are available at Alabama Forestry Commission county offices and are due May 30.

The Alabama Conservation Advisory Board voted unanimously to extend deer hunting season into February for south Alabama, including most areas south of U.S. Highway 80.

-Rick Oates, divisions director

Peanuts

The Alabama Peanut Producers Association donated 10,000 jars of peanut butter to the Bay Area Food Bank in Theodore, Ala. The donation will be distributed to non-profit agencies in the food bank's 24-county area.

-Jim Cravey, interim division director

Bee & Honey

The U.S. House Agriculture Committee held a hearing April 29 to discuss challenges facing pollinator populations, including honeybees. Topics covered included the increase in Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD), research on the causes of CCD and economic viability for beekeepers. For more information on the report, go to sustainableagriculture.net/blog.

-Mac Higginbotham, division director

Auburn Students Hired As Summer Interns

Auburn University College of Agriculture students Boyd C. Christenberry and Kayla Sellers began summer internships at the Alabama Farmers Federation May 5.

Christenberry, a senior in agricultural economics, will work with the Department of Governmental and Agricultural Programs (GAP).

"This is a great opportunity for me to network and travel around the state, get my hands dirty and find what I'd like to do in the business world," said the Birmingham native.

GAP Department Director Brian Hardin said he plans to keep Christenberry busy this summer.

"Among other tasks, he will work with the TREASURE Forest Association (TFA) to help revitalize county chapters," Hardin said. TFA merged with the Federation in October.

Sellers, a Pintlala resident and Federation scholarship recipient, is a senior in agricultural communications interning in the Department of Public Relations and Communications.

"This is the opportunity of a lifetime," Sellers said. "The experiences I will receive by working in this department are invaluable along with my Auburn education."

Jeff Helms, director of public relations and communications, said Sellers' energy, enthusiasm and love of agriculture will be assets to the department.

"Kayla will be responsible for news and feature writing, photography, copy editing, research and project management," Helms said. "This experience will help prepare her to be an effective advocate for agriculture."

Both students have family connections with Alfa. Christenberry's grandfather was executive vice president of marketing for Alfa Insurance. Sellers' late grandfather was a Montgomery County Farmers Federation board member, and her parents worked with Alfa Realty.



Christenberry



Sellers

Lincoln High School FFA Hosts Farm Day



Talladega County elementary school students learned about farm animals and machinery at the county's first Farm Day hosted by the Lincoln High School FFA. Above, front row, are Autumn Wilson, Riley Stephens, Camel the goat, FFA advisor and Talladega County Young Farmers Committee Chairman Amy Stephens and Baylee Pollard. Standing are Josh Morgan and Talladega County Women's Leadership Committee Chairman Becky Jenkins.

Governor Releases Initial Water Committee Report

Gov. Robert Bentley announced results of an initial report from the Alabama Water Agencies Working Group (AWAWG) at the state Capitol April 17. Bentley established AWAWG in 2012 and charged the group with recommending a state-wide water management action plan.

"(This plan) is needed for economic development, public health, drought mitigation, recreation and environmental

uses," Bentley said.

The Alabama Farmers Federation submitted comments to AWAWG and will monitor plan development to ensure agricultural needs are addressed.

The report analyzed Alabama's current water management strategies and recommended actions to establish a state water plan. View the report online at adeca.alabama.gov.

OBITUARIES

Richard Edward Owens Sr., former president of the Greene County Farmers Federation, died March 7. He was 92.

He is survived by a daughter, Janet Owens Selig; a son, Richard Edward Owens Jr. (Debbie); six grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

Memorials may be made to Pleasant Ridge Presbyterian Church Cemetery Fund, 21730 Highway 14, Eutaw, AL 35462 or Hospice of West Alabama, 3851 Loop Road, Tuscaloosa, AL 35404.

Gary B. Warren, a member of the Winston County Farmers Federation, died April 10. He was 64. Warren previously served on the Alabama State Board of Education.

Survivors include his wife, Linda League Warren, and daughters Candace Williams (Judd) and Amy Warren.

Memorials may be made to Alabama's Chapter of Future Farmers of America.

Upcoming Federation Events And Deadlines

- The **Peanut Checkoff Referendum** is June 17 for peanut producers to vote on continuing the state checkoff. Call the Alabama Peanut Producers Association at (334) 792-6482 for polling locations and times.
- The **Youth Leadership Conference**, sponsored by the State Young Farmers Committee, is June 30-July 2 in Columbiana. Alabama high school students are eligible to apply. Applications are available online at AlfaYoungFarmers.org and are due May 13.
- **Excellence In Agriculture and Discussion Meet** applications are due July 1. The competitions take place in August at the Alabama Farmers Federation's Commodity Producers Conference. For more information, visit AlfaYoungFarmers.org.
- The **Alabama Farmers Federation Beef Tour** in Minnesota is June 29-July 2. Registration is limited to the first 50 people. More details are available online at events.SignUp4.net/2014BeefTour.

Customer Appreciation In Ozark



Ozark Alfa Insurance Service Center employees treated folks to a spread of doughnuts, hot dogs, chips and drinks May 2 for Customer Appreciation Day. Alfa customer Lynn Hughes, second from left, stands with agents David Norris, William Snell and Shane Norris.

Easter Food Bank Donation



Lee County Young Farmers Chairman Katie Brown, left, helps deliver 363 pounds of donated food to the East Alabama Food Bank April 16. Items were collected at Alfa Insurance service centers in Opelika and Auburn to help provide an Easter meal for 10 needy families. The Lee County Farmers Federation provided 10 hams.



P.O. Box 11000
Montgomery, AL 36191-0001

Non-Profit Org
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit #310
Montgomery, AL

THE CULTIVATOR is published monthly by the Alabama Farmers Federation, a member of the American Farm Bureau Federation. Correspondence may be addressed to **THE CULTIVATOR**, Mary Johnson, P.O. Box 11000, Montgomery, AL 36191-0001.

USDA Releases 2012 Census Of Agriculture

Sales and production expenses on Alabama farms reached record levels in 2012, according to the USDA. The agency's National Agricultural Statistics Service released the final 2012 Census of Agriculture May 2.

Farmers in the state reported selling \$5.57 billion worth of agricultural products but racked up \$4.7 billion in production costs. The greatest expenses for farmers were feed, non-breeding livestock, fertilizer and labor.

The report ranked Alabama second in the nation in broilers, peanuts and quail. Poultry and eggs are still the largest commodity for the state, accounting for 85.2 percent of total livestock, poultry and related products sold.

The census showed a 10 percent increase in farmers selling directly to consumers and a 15 percent increase in farms producing renewable energy.

Data collected is reported at the national, state and county levels. For more information about the census, visit agcensus.usda.gov.

Endorsed Candidates Visit Winston County



The Winston County Women's Leadership Committee held its annual candidate forum April 10 at the Traders and Farmers Bank in Double Springs. Front row, from left, are Linda Moody, Linda Seymore, Mary Sudduth, Diane Allison, Chairman Ronnie Mobley and Kim Seymore. Back row, from left, are John Sudduth; Public Service Commission Place 2 candidate Chip Beeker; Secretary of State candidate John Merrill; State Rep. Mike Millican, R-Hamilton, incumbent in House District 17; and Winston County Farmers Federation President Carl Godsey.