

NCSU chancellor meets North Carolina's dynamic agriculture industry

The agricultural community and special guests including U.S. Senators Richard Burr and Saxby Chambliss, U.S. Rep. Bob Etheridge and Indiana Farm Bureau President Don Villwock gathered May 10 to introduce new North Carolina State University Chancellor Randy Woodson to N.C.'s ag industry.

In addition to detailing the state's \$70 billion ag industry for Woodson, many speakers shared updates on their work in the ag arena.

Burr said his focus now is on keeping the appropriate balance of regulation over agriculture and opening up markets.

"We ought to be the first ones looking at how to open up markets for you," Burr said. "We have got to make sure we keep access to markets."

At the same time, Burr said Congress must reach a solution to debt that is suffocating the U.S.

The U.S. has a great responsibility looking ahead—a responsibility to feed a growing world, Etheridge said. He added places like NCSU and its



From left, NCFB President Larry Wooten, NCSU Chancellor Randy Woodson and Indiana Farm Bureau President Don Villwock.

research would make meeting that challenge possible.

He agreed the next farm bill will come with challenges and the U.S. must resolve trade issues.

Chambliss (R-GA) said the good work done on

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Budget takes top priority as legislative short session begins

The General Assembly began its short legislative session and work on the state's budget May 12.

State lawmakers could face a shortfall of as much as \$1.2 billion in year two of the \$19 billion state spending plan approved in 2009.

Farm Bureau Member N.C. Rep. William Brisson (D-Bladen, Cumberland) said his priority will be protecting agriculture, keeping unfunded mandates out of the budget and avoiding new spending. He said he hopes the session stays budget-focused.

"Let's balance it out and go on," he said.

Many House and Senate members are gearing up for re-election campaigns and are likely eager to return to their districts.

N.C. Rep. David R. Lewis (R-Harnett), also a

Farm Bureau member, said every department will have to tighten its belt, but it is important to maintain the farmland preservation trust fund, for which \$2 million was set aside in the original budget but left out of Gov. Beverly Perdue's budget.

Lewis said agriculture and other industries are relying on lawmakers to keep their taxes low and regulation manageable.

Both Brisson and Lewis are vice-chairs of the House Agriculture Committee.

At press time, senators were considering a \$19 billion plan that would cut 27 positions from the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and slice almost \$2 million from its \$60.5 mil-

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the 2008 farm bill had helped sustain agriculture during the recession, but big changes would likely be ahead.

“Times are tight and we’re going to have to do more with less in agriculture,” he said.

Chambliss said maintaining agriculture’s profitability would be a must in any climate change legislation Congress passes.

North Carolina Farm Bureau President Larry Wooten also gave an update on some of the issues NCFB has been following most closely.

Among them he listed animal care activists and the need for comprehensive immigration reform.

“Our agricultural diversity in this state makes labor a big issue,” he said.

Chancellor Woodson said NCSU’s adherence to its land-grant university mission and commitment to the ideals of cooperative extension lured him to Raleigh.

“This state is committed to extension, and that’s

AgBiz Planner available to Farm Bureau members

Several North Carolina Farm Bureau members were among the 29 young, beginning, small and minority farmers who recently completed a Farm Credit AgBiz Planner program.

The college-level, online course helped participants develop business and financial plans, as well as budgeting and management skills.

Farm Bureau members who participated in the AgBiz Planner program included: Luke Blizzard, Greene County; Andrew Burleson, Stanly County; Matthew Johnson, Iredell County; Brent Leggett, Nash County; Jay Thompson, Wake County; Johnnie Tyndall, Lenoir County; Jay Vinson, Johnston County; and Sam Walton, Robeson County.

Information on the program’s next session can be found online at www.agcarolina.com, www.carolinafarmcredit.com and www.capefearfarmcredit.com.

Applications will be accepted until Sept. 1.



U.S. Sen. Richard Burr



U.S. Rep. Bob Etheridge

something you should be very, very proud of,” he said.

Other officials from the university told commodity groups about the budget challenges their departments are facing.

At a time when the agriculture and life science programs are growing, the college of agriculture and life sciences had to make a 10 percent budget cut last year and might have to cut by about 6 percent more this year, said Ken Esbenshade, associate dean and director of academic programs.

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lion budget approved in 2009. The cuts would come largely through personnel and travel.

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services faced big cuts too. It has identified \$375 million in net cuts to its \$4.3 billion plan.

Despite the budget focus, some other issues could arise this session.

A bill that passed the House last year to require a referendum on involuntary annexations is expected to die in the Senate.

Also, the long-running controversy over whether the state should allow illegal immigrants to enroll in a North Carolina community college appears to be coming back to the forefront.

A few bills were filed to overturn the State Board of Community College’s decision to allow illegal immigrants to enroll.

Farm concerns appear in legislative water commission findings

North Carolina's Legislative Study Commission on Water and Wastewater Infrastructure met May 11 to vote on an interim report that included recommendations from the commission's four working groups.

North Carolina Farm Bureau served on the commission and on its Working Group One. Commission co-chairs are N.C. Sen. Charlie Albertson and N.C. Rep. James Crawford.

"Of the 10 legislative proposals that emerged from the working groups' recommendations, two dealt specifically with agriculture," said Mitch Peele, NCFB's senior public policy director.

The first agriculturally-related proposal would direct the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources to work with NCFB and other agricultural organizations toward a specific goal.

The collaboration would be designed to develop a plan for agriculture water infrastructure needs, update it regularly and report the results to the North Carolina General Assembly every five years.

The agriculture community is currently in the process of developing such a plan, which is ex-

pected to be complete in September.

The commission's second agriculturally-related proposal would direct the NCDA&CS and DENR to design a new cost-share program that would assist landowners and farmers in protecting water resources.

Study commission members Rep. Crawford, Rep. Cullie Tarleton, Rep. Bill Owens and Rep. Mitch Gillespie are sponsoring these proposals.

During an April 22 meeting of the commission, Working Group One's Robin Smith, assistant secretary with DENR, discussed background information and presented the group's recommendations.

"The primary ongoing source of information for assessing our wastewater infrastructure needs is a needs survey that our program conducts every four years for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency," she said. "The reason we do it for EPA is because the results of that survey get used by Congress in appropriating the funds out to the states for the state's revolving loan funds."

A 2008 DENR Division of Soil and Water Conservation survey identified water supply needs in the areas of well construction and water storage in the form of farm ponds.

U.S. Senate climate bill presented May 12

The U.S. Senate climate bill could have consequences for agriculture, but Farm Bureau will remain engaged in the debate.

U.S. Sen. John Kerry (D-MA) and U.S. Sen. Joe Lieberman (I-CT) released the 1,000-page American Power Act May 12.

"As with other climate change bills, we have concerns about the economic impact on farmers and ranchers because of potentially higher fertilizer and energy costs," AFBF President Bob Stallman said. "We do not want to see farmers driven out of business due to additional regulation and the potential for higher input costs."

The bill includes a cap-and-trade plan to tax large emitters, regulates emission by sectors instead of across-the-board and sets a goal of reducing U.S. carbon emissions by 17 percent by 2020 and more than 80 percent by 2050.

The plan could threaten farmland by encouraging acreage to be moved into carbon capture. Also, renewable electricity standards were missing from the bill, and AFBF seeks a greater supply of nucle-

ar energy, renewable fuels and natural gas.

On May 13, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency issued a final rule to regulate greenhouse gases, which some see as a way to secure the 60 votes needed to pass climate change legislation, which is perceived as a better alternative to agency regulation.

The rule would affect about 15,500 sources including coal-fired plants, refineries and landfills.

ACTIONREQUEST

Given our state's current economic condition, expanding broadband access is a common sense way to invest in rural North Carolina. In today's global economy, broadband access is critical infrastructure. Please visit NCFB's website at www.ncfb.org and click on the Action Alert link to send an e-mail to your state senators and representatives encouraging them to support expanding broadband high-speed Internet access.

U.S. House bill would let U.S. government regulate all water

For some time there was concern over whether there would be an effort to remove the word “navigable” from the language in the Clean Water Act, and now a bill to that effect has been introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives.

On April 21, U.S. Rep. James Oberstar (D-MN) introduced the America’s Commitment to Clean Water Act, which would give the U.S. government authority to regulate all water in the United States — from farmers’ irrigation canals to backyard ponds and rain puddles.

American Farm Bureau President Bob Stallman quickly issued a statement condemning the bill.

“If the word ‘navigable’ is deleted from the law, any farm pond or ditch would be at the mercy of federal regulations,” Stallman said.

“This vague and overreaching amendment to the Clean Water Act is unacceptable to America’s

farm and ranch families.”

North Carolina Farm Bureau opposes efforts to expand the definition of “waters” under the Federal Clean Water Act, including deleting the word “navigable.”

Oberstar said he believes the Clean Water Act was originally intended to regulate all water, but U.S. Supreme Court decisions to restrict regulatory authority to water passable by ships undermined the bill’s intent and made its application confusing.

“There was never any doubt that the Clean Water Act was to have broad authority,” Oberstar said in a news release. “There were no limits on the number of streams, lakes or shorelines to be protected; it just said ‘the waters of the United States.’ The Supreme Court has greatly limited the scope of the act and greatly confused the application of the existing law.”

New local food council considers food safety, acts on farm preservation

Earth Day served as the backdrop for a meeting of the new North Carolina Sustainable Local Food Advisory Council, April 22, at the N.C. State Fairgrounds in Raleigh.

The council’s agenda included food safety, an update on the Center for Environmental Farming Systems, and farmland preservation, which resulted in sending a resolution for funding to the North Carolina General Assembly.

Senate Bill 1067 established the council Aug. 28, 2009 as a means “to address program and policy considerations regarding the development of a sustainable local food economy in North Carolina.”

The first major agricultural issue discussed by the council was the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s proposed rules dealing with food safety.

“These rules could have serious implications, especially for small farmers across North Carolina and across the nation,” said N.C. Ag Commissioner Steve Troxler, who serves as council chairman.

“It’s an issue that’s going to come to the forefront really quickly.”

Council members consented to keep a watchful eye on any and all FDA actions related to food safety regulations.

The Center for Environmental Farming Systems’ Jennifer Curtis outlined the CEFS’ detailed statewide action guide and described some major trends. She also focused on three key terms: sustainable, organic and local.

“There’s considerable interest in local, organic and sustainably produced foods despite the downturn in the economy,” Curtis said. “At the national level, local food is expected to be a \$7 billion market next year, up from \$5 billion in 2005. Organic food continues to rise 20 percent a year.”

Council members also voted to urge state legislators to include \$5 million in the state budget for the farmland preservation trust fund.

The council followed up May 10 with a resolution it sent to N.C. Senate budget writers asking the N.C. General Assembly to fund the Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund for the fiscal year that begins July 1.

“The Council finds that it is critical to integrate farmland preservation into the development of a sustainable local food economy,” the resolution states. “Protecting and preserving farmland is an important part of the council’s effort to rebuild our local food infrastructure and our local food economy.”

Workshop focuses on nuts-and-bolts of VAD's

In North Carolina, 79 Voluntary Agricultural Districts (VADs) or Enhanced Voluntary Agricultural Districts (EVADs) have been approved, and more are on the way.

Many of the counties and towns that have adopted districts are still in the early stages, and a pair of recent workshops offered an overview of how to administer and develop VADs, EVADs and farmland protection plans.

In a VAD, landowners can enlist qualifying farmland, forestland or horticultural land for 10 years without a commitment. In an EVAD, properties in the district are mandated to remain in the district for 10 years.

Brandon King, with North Carolina State University, said the benefits of a VAD can be help with water and sewer assessments, having an official role in government, protection from nuisance lawsuits and more.

King said the costs of joining are generally low. The major expenses are recording agreements and applications, and purchasing signage.

Montgomery County Farm Bureau President **Benny Hampton** is chairman of the advisory board overseeing the creation of his county's EVAD, which started taking membership applications in May.

"We're just getting started with our VAD and EVAD program, and we're working on signs," Hampton said.

The nuts-and-bolts of getting a VAD or EVAD up and running were the topics of greatest interest during the daylong session. Municipal planners, extension staffers and others also heard discussions about signage, filing records and notification, condemnations and how an increasing military presence in the state will co-exist with rural agriculture.

Farmland is often attractive to road developers looking at new and expanded roadways to serve North Carolina's growing population, and an agricultural district can be a way to ward off land grabs for roads and rights-of-way.

"Getting involved early is crucial to protecting these resources," said Ritchie Tuttle, from the North Carolina Department of Transportation.

During a panel on condemnation and eminent domain, farmer George Smith of Johnston County told his story of going through a condemnation proceeding.

"Don't negotiate an easement, and lease, and right-of-way without getting expert legal advice," Smith said.

Gary Pierce of Harnett County shared how he got a county commission unconcerned with preserving farmland to establish an ag district.

Pierce said he proved protecting agriculture and farmland through a VAD would be good for the economy, would make county land-use planning easier and would serve as an educational tool for newcomers.

BUREAUBRIEFS

CONSERVATION PROGRAMS—USDA recently announced the availability of four conservation programs authorized by the 2008 Farm Bill. Farmers may now apply for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). Applications will be accepted through June 11. Eligibility checklists and applications are available from local Natural Resources Conservation Service offices or online at www.nrcs.usda.gov. In addition, conservation assistance is available to 37 states through the following three programs: the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP); Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP); and Grassland Reserve Program (GRP).

LEGAL ADVOCACY WEBSITE—American Farm Bureau Federation's legal department has launched a new "Legal Affairs" section of AFBF's Voice of Agriculture website. The legal advocacy section of AFBF's website makes it easy to find the information on active and closed cases impacting farmers. The site is available at <http://www.fb.org/index.php?fuseaction=legal.home>.

TOBACCO BIOFUEL—Researchers are looking at genetically modifying the tobacco plant for use as a biofuel. Scientists believe using tobacco would be beneficial because it would not affect a major U.S. food source. Tobacco is an attractive "energy plant" because it can generate a large amount of oil and sugar more efficiently than other crops. Researchers found that modifying the plant produced as much as 20 times more oil, according to the report published online in December.

There are two specific challenges impacting all farmers, each commodity group and every rural community in North Carolina—water and energy.

Water is the determining factor in where and how fast agriculture grows. With the state's population among the top 10 fastest growing in the nation, competition for water is a significant challenge.



Since the carrot is far more effective than the stick, farmers should be rewarded for conservation, new technologies and **voluntary** efforts.

On the state level, Farm Bureau and 12 other groups are developing a strategic water plan to help protect farm access to water.

Federally, a repackaged version of the Clean Water Restoration Act was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives on April 21 as America's Commitment to Clean Water Act.

H.R. 5088 is another bad bill with a nice-sounding title. It would strike the word "navigable" from the Clean Water Act and hand the EPA more power. Farm Bureau is working hard against its passage.

Energy is a key line-item in the budget of any farm. Whether it's solar, cellulosic or wind, moving forward creates controversy. The debate arises because there is a **perception** of winners and losers.

With the United Nations stating the need for a 70 percent increase in food production by 2050 to feed an estimated 9 billion people, the common denominator for every industry is the increased use of energy.

Agriculture must be a prominent part of the energy and water debates to keep misperceptions from becoming a damaging reality.

6 Corn production for 2010-11 is projected at 13.4 billion bushels, up 260 million bushels from 2009-10.

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