

USDA claims proposed rule increases fairness for producers

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has announced that USDA's Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA) will publish a proposed rule that will improve fairness in the marketing of livestock and poultry for American farmers.

As required by the 2008 farm bill and through existing authority under the Packers and Stockyards Act, the rule would provide significant new protections for producers against unfair, fraudulent or retaliatory practices, according to USDA.

"Concerns about a lack of fairness and common-sense treatment for livestock and poultry producers have gone unaddressed far too long," said Vilsack. "This proposed rule will help ensure a level playing field for producers by providing additional protections against unfair practices and addressing new market conditions not covered by existing rules."

Alabama Farmers Federation President Jerry Newby said the proposed rules address concerns that have been discussed for many years.

"We support an open dialogue between growers and integrators that will result in contracts that are mutually beneficial for both farm families and the companies that invest in our communities," Newby said.

Many of the concerns addressed in the proposed rule were raised during a joint USDA-Department of Justice Competition Workshop at Alabama A&M University May 21. Additionally, GIPSA held three public meetings in 2008 to gather comments, information and recommendations from interested parties.

Many of the concerns were related to increasing consolida-



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Governor Signs Bills



Gov. Bob Riley held a formal bill signing last week that included the Quail Preserve Licensing Bill sponsored by Sen. Roger Bedford, D-Russellville; and Rep. Thomas Jackson, D-Thomasville. Pictured from left are Alabama Farmers Federation Assistant Director of Governmental & Agricultural Programs Brian Hardin, Federation lobbyist Kim Davis, Federation Wildlife Producers State Committee Chairman Del Hill of Talladega County, Riley, Chief Enforcement Officer for the Alabama Department of Conservation & Natural Resources Allan Andress, Rep. Jackson and Federation Wildlife Division Director Steve Guy. Other bills formally signed that day included the Livestock Care and Handling Bill and the Checkoff Audit Bill.

Grace hits the road to 'pickup' support

Dorman Grace is hitting the road next week to "pickup" support for his campaign in the July 13 Republican runoff for Alabama Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries.

Farmers from throughout the state will be joining Grace in a caravan of pickups that will criss-cross Alabama Wednesday and Thursday. Some farmers will make the entire journey; others will drive through their county or may join the group at one of the rally points.

The Huntsville rally is at 9 a.m. Wednesday at the Huntsville Depot on Church Street. The next stop will be 2 p.m. at Kelly Trailer Sales on Highway 87 in Alabaster just off

I-65. Thursday's rally begins at 10 a.m. in a field on Vaughn Road just east of the Taylor Road intersection in Montgomery. The last stop will be in Dothan at SunSouth John Deere, 168 Ross Clark Circle.

"I'll be driving my own truck in the caravan just like the other farmers," Grace said. "They know I'm a farmer just like them. We've done a good job of getting our message out; now, we've got to make sure we get our voters out for the July 13th runoff."

Grace, who is a third-generation farmer from Walker County, has been endorsed by the Alabama Farmers Federation. For more info visit DormanGrace.com.

National AITC Conference



Alabama delegates attending the National Ag in the Classroom Conference in Baltimore, Md. last week prepared baskets spotlighting Alabama products during the states-sponsored breakfast. Three-hundred and fifty educators from across the nation attended at the conference. Pictured from left are; Alabama AITC Chairman Kim Earwood, AITC volunteer Dewandee Neyman from Centre, Rebekah Hurst and Becky Robertson from First Assembly Christian School in Ashland and Emily White from Chestnut Grove Elementary in Decatur.

Forsythe named chief financial officer of Alfa

Alfa Insurance has announced the promotion of Ralph Forsythe to chief financial officer.

Forsythe, who previously served as senior vice president and chief accounting officer, will direct the financial strategy of the Alfa companies including oversight of accounting, tax, financial planning and reporting functions.

In announcing the promotion, Alfa Executive Vice President of Operations Lee Ellis commended Forsythe on his ability to effectively manage the complex, day-to-day financial operations of the company while working to position Alfa for future growth.

"Ralph not only brings a wealth of accounting and financial expertise to this position, but he also recently provided leadership for the team that developed Alfa's strategic vision for the next decade," Ellis said. "This vision capitalizes on our company's strength as a leader in personal service and helps us iden-

tify ways we can better serve our policyholders."

Forsythe said he appreciates the opportunity to build on Alfa's position as one of the top 75 insurance carriers in the United States, in terms of financial strength.



Forsythe

"I am excited to have the opportunity to serve Alfa as its chief financial officer," said Forsythe. "We have a great company with a strong focus on providing exceptional service to our customers."

A certified public accountant, Forsythe joined Alfa in 2001 as vice president and assistant chief financial officer. He previously served as chief financial officer of the Coriolis Group in Scottsdale, Ariz., and as vice president and chief financial officer of United Methodist Publishing House in Nashville, Tenn.

DOT calls off peanut ban for airplanes

The Department of Transportation (DOT) has released a clarification to its recently proposed ruling on potentially banning peanuts from airplanes.

The DOT now says that before any ruling could be made the agency would have to comply with previous legislation requiring a scientific study.

The agency cannot enact a policy on a peanut-free buffer zone or ban peanuts outright until a peer-reviewed scientific study determines that passengers can suffer severe reactions to peanuts as a result of contact with very small airborne peanut particles that passengers might encounter in an aircraft.

The comment period for the proposed rule is open until Aug. 9.

USDA to help expand migratory bird habitat

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will work with Alabama farmers, ranchers and landowners to develop and enhance habitat for birds migrating south to the Gulf of Mexico through a \$3 million initiative recently announced by USDA.

Commissioner of Agriculture and Industries Ron Sparks initiated the funding from USDA. Signup for the program ends Aug. 2. Interested producers should contact their local USDA Service Center for information or go to www.al.nrcs.usda.gov for details.

High priority areas in Alabama are Baldwin and Mobile counties. Priority counties are Autauga, Barbour, Butler, Choctaw, Clarke, Conecuh, Dallas, Escambia, Greene, Hale, Henry, Houston, Lowndes, Marengo, Monroe, Montgomery, Perry, Pickens, Sumter, Washington and Wilcox. Priority counties for enrolling catfish ponds for conversion to migratory bird habitat under WRP are Dallas, Greene, Hale, Marengo, Perry, Pickens and Sumter.

ADEM sets hearing to review CAFOs, AFOS

The Alabama Department of Environmental Management will hold a public hearing Aug. 10 at its building at 1400 Coliseum Blvd. in Montgomery to hear comments about state rules for Animal Feeding Operations (AFO) and Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO).

The comment period and hearing is held to receive data, views and comments from interested persons regarding the rules. Attendance at the hearing is not necessary in order to have comments included in the official administrative record. Those wishing to submit comments may do so at the hearing or through the mail. In order to be considered, comments must be received by the hearing officer before 5 p.m., Aug. 10.

Mail comments to: ADEM Hearing Officer, Field Operations Division, ADEM, P.O. Box 301463, Montgomery, AL 36130-1463 or email fieldmail@adem.state.al.us.

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tion and vertical integration in the livestock and poultry marketplace, and shrinking farm numbers. The proposed rule would provide the following protections:

- Provide further definition to practices that are unfair, unjustly discriminatory or deceptive, including outlining actions that are retaliatory in nature, efforts that would limit a producer's legal rights, or representations that would be fraudulent or misleading. Additionally, the proposed rule reiterates USDA's position that a producer need not overcome unnecessary obstacles and have to always prove a harm to competition when they have suffered a violation under the Act;

- Define undue or unreasonable preferences or advantages;

- Establish new protections for producers required to provide expensive capital upgrades to their growing facilities, including protections to ensure producers have the

opportunity to recoup 80 percent of the cost of a required capital investment;

- Prohibit packers from purchasing, acquiring or receiving livestock from other packers, and communicate prices to competitors;

- Enable a fair and equitable process for producers that choose to use arbitration to remedy a dispute. Additionally, clear and conspicuous print in the contract will be required to ensure producers are provided the option to decline the use of arbitration to settle a dispute.

- Require that companies paying growers under a tournament system provide the same base pay to growers that raise the same type and kind of poultry, including ensuring that the growers' pay cannot go below the base pay amount;

- Provide poultry growers with a written notice of a company's intent to suspend the delivery of birds under a poultry growing

arrangement at least 90 days prior to the date it intends to suspend the delivery;

- Improve market transparency by making sample contracts (except for trade secrets or other confidential information) available on GIPSA's website for producers;

- Outline protections so that producers can remedy a breach of contract;

- Improve competition in markets by limiting exclusive arrangements between packers and dealers.

The proposed rule was published June 22 in the Federal Register. GIPSA will consider comments received by Aug. 23.

Comments may be emailed to: Comments.gipsa@usda.gov or mailed to Tess Butler, GIPSA, USDA, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Room 1643-S, Washington, D.C. 20250-3604. Copies of the proposed rule and additional information can be found at: www.gipsa.usda.gov by clicking on *Federal Register*.

Alfa Farmers Market Day



The seventh annual Alfa Farmers Market Day attracted hundreds of eager shoppers employed by Alfa Insurance and the Alabama Farmers Federation. Shoppers purchased a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables as well as farm-raised shrimp from Alabama producers. The market was held at the Federation's home office in Montgomery on June 18.

U.S. reaches agreement with Russia to resume poultry exports

The United States and Russia have reached an agreement to permit the resumption of U.S. poultry exports to Russia.

Under the agreement, the United States will publish information on USDA's website about which disinfectants/pathogen reduction treatments are known to be approved by Russia for processing poultry and on food generally.

The United States will provide information to Russia on solutions that companies use on poultry shipped to Russia. The United States will also give Russia an updated list of poultry processing facilities authorized to ship poultry to Russia, which is the largest export market for U.S. poultry.

The agreement is especially good news for Alabama, which is the third-largest poultry-producing state in the country.

"More poultry exported means more poultry being produced by Alabama farmers," said Alabama Farmers Federation Poultry Division Director Guy Hall. "Over the last two years, many producers have had extended time between flocks and decreased bird density. Hopefully Alabama poultry producers will be more profitable due to the increase in trade with Russia."

Next farm bill may have lower payments

House Agriculture Committee Chairman Collin Peterson (D-Minn.) said the next farm bill may include reduced payments in order to cut the budget to reduce the deficit.

"We're not going to have any new money; we'll probably have less money," Peterson said at a recent House Agriculture subcommittee hearing on the farm bill.

At the hearing, Philip Nelson, Illinois Farm Bureau president, said the structure of the 2008 bill should be maintained even if overall funding is reduced. At the hearing, Nelson outlined Farm Bureau's five farm bill principles.

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Billboard Promotion



The Pike County Farmers Federation recently purchased a billboard along U.S. Highway 231 north of Troy that promotes agriculture and the county Federation to passing motorists. Pictured in front of the sign are, from left, front row, County Young Farmers Chairman James Jordan and Women's Leadership Committee Chairman June Flowers; back row, Vice Chairman Frank Talbot, Secretary-Treasurer Don Wambles, Board Member Steve Stroud, President John Dorrell and Area Organization Director David Cole.