

Capitol LINK

CURRENT ISSUES AFFECTING WISCONSIN AGRICULTURE & AGRI-BUSINESS

January 2009

2009-2010 Wisconsin Legislative Session is Underway

By *Jordan Lamb*

The 2009-2010 Wisconsin Legislative Session is underway and the Democrats hold the majorities in both State Assembly and the State Senate. In the Assembly, which was lead by the Republicans last session, this means that there are a new group of Committee Chairpersons.

The Assembly Agriculture Committee is chaired by Representative Amy Sue Vruwink (D-Milladore). Representative Vruwink brings a dairy background to this position and has been a member of this committee in the past. The rest of this committee is comprised of Mark Radcliffe (D-Black River Falls), Phil Garthwaite (D-Dickeyville), Andy Jorgenson (D-Fort Atkinson), Louis Melepske (D-Stevens Point), Chris Danou (D-Trempealeau), Al Ott (R-Forest Junction), Lee Nerison (R-Westby), John Murtha (R-Baldwin), Gary Tauchen (R-Fort Atkinson) and Ed Brooks (R-Reedsburg). Representatives Radcliffe, Danou and Brooks are newly-elected to the Legislature.

Assembly Natural Resources is chaired by Representative Spencer Black (D-Madison). Representative Black is a long-time member of the Assembly and of this Committee.

The Senate Committee on Agriculture and Higher Education is chaired by Senator Kathleen Vineout (D-Alma). Senator Vineout was the chair of this Committee last session as well and bring her farming experience and close ties to the ag community. Other members of this Committee include Pat Krietlow (D-Chippewa Falls), Jeff Plale (D-South Milwaukee), Sheila Harsdorf (R-River Falls), and Dan Kapanke (R-La Crosse).

Senate Environment Committee is chaired by Senator Mark Miller (D-Monona) this session. Senator Miller has also chaired this Committee in the past. It is expected that water use issues will be referred to this Committee this session.

One of the most critical issues facing Wisconsin farmers this session will likely relate to *water use and water access*. Many in the environmental community have targeted “limiting access to water” and “limiting water use” as legislative priorities for the 2009-2010 legislative session. It is expected that proposals aimed at additional regulation of high-capacity wells to be introduced this session as a response to the final report issued by the DNR’s Groundwater Advisory Committee in December 2007.

In addition, the state's implementing legislation tied to the adoption of the Great Lakes Compact including efforts to impose undefined water conservation practices that could have limited members' access to water. Although these proposals were not included in the final implementing legislation, the Compact debate is not over. There will be extensive rulemaking to implement the legislation over the next several years.

Amendments to Wis. Admin Code. s. NR 151 are also expected to be considered next session. NR 151 establishes the performance standards for nonpoint source pollution regulation in Wisconsin. (The DATCP establishes the technical standards used to meet these performance standards.)

Watch the development of the budget bill closely for tax changes that may affect farmers.

Gray Wolf Regulation Remains a Gray Area

By Jordan Lamb

Shortly after his inauguration, President Barack Obama signed an executive order delaying the de-listing of the gray wolf from the federal Endangered Species List. The wolf will remain on the List until the new administration has time to review wolf protections.

The gray wolf population has grown from 250 in the year 2000 to an estimate of 537-564 in 2008, according to the DNR. The DNR's goal for re-establishing the wolf population in Wisconsin was to get approximately 350 wolves in the State.

While this is a success story, the rapid wolf population increase has harmed cattle and other livestock producers because wolves prey on grazing calves and the presence of wolves on farms creates extreme stress on cattle and operators.

Ag Day at the Capitol is March 11, 2009

By Jordan Lamb

Ag Day at the Capitol will be March 11, 2009 at the Monona Terrace Convention Center in Madison. It's a large gathering of farmers from across the state representing a variety of farm commodities groups, where they learn more about state issues, and meet with their elected officials. This year's discussions will include discussions on the state budget, and upcoming agricultural and environmental issues. Farmers can register by calling the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation at 1-800-261-3276. The cost is \$15. The registration deadline is February 27. To learn more about this event visit this website:

<http://www.wfbf.com/archivej/htmArchive/showPage.aspx?page=15569.htm&id=15569>.

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