

SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY FOR: October 16, 1998

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COMPLETED ACTIVITIES:

BUDGET AGREEMENT REACHED -- OMNIBUS APPROPRIATIONS PACKAGE EMERGING-

On Thursday October 15th, White House and Congressional negotiators announced that agreement had been reached on the FY'99 Federal Budget. Following the passage of 4 Continuing Resolutions, which have kept the Federal Government in operation since October 1, the Budget deal addresses key spending issues, including funding for education, support for the International Monetary Fund, and aid for the crisis in Agriculture. On Friday, the Congress will attempt to bring the Omnibus Appropriations measure to the floor for final approval. However, many details of the package require extensive staff work. If the legislation cannot be passed by the close of legislative business on Friday, another Continuing Resolution will be drafted, keeping the government in operation until the House and Senate can act on Monday or Tuesday. The Omnibus Appropriations bill will contain amended language of H.R. 4101, the Agriculture Appropriations Bill for FY'99, which was previously vetoed by the President. A summary of the expected funding levels for NRCS are as follows:

(in Thousands)

Conservation Operations.....	\$641,243
Watershed Surveys and Planning.....	\$ 10,368
Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations.....	\$ 99,443
Forestry Incentives Program.....	\$ 6,325
Emergency FIP funding	+\$ 10,000
	Total \$ 16,325
Resource Conservation and Development.....	\$ 35,000
Wetlands Reserve Program	(sets enrollment target at 120,000 acres)
Environmental Quality Incentives Program.....	\$174,000
Conservation Farm Option.....	no funding

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program.....\$ 20,000
 Farmland Protection Program.....no funding

FLOOD PREVENTION HEARING CANCELED-

The Department Operations Subcommittee of the House Agriculture Committee (Chairman Goodlatte, R-VA) canceled a hearing to discuss H.R. 4128, a bill to amend the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act to ensure that States and local governments can quickly and safely remove flood debris so as to reduce the risk and severity of subsequent flooding. The hearing has not been rescheduled.

USDA INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY BILL PASSES SENATE-

On Monday October 12th, the Senate passed S. 2116, legislation which would clarify and enhance the authorities of the Chief Information Officer of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The legislation was introduced by Sen. Richard Lugar (R-IN) on May 22, 1998. Action on the legislation has not taken place in House of Representatives, and is unlikely given the short time-frame remaining in the legislative session.

LEGISLATION OF NOTE-

The following bills of significance to NRCS and conservation were recently introduced:

Bill	Member	Purpose
S.2493	Harkin (IA)	Would allow tax credit for the nutrient management costs of animal feeding operations.
S. 2595	Daschle (SD)	Would amend the Housing and Community Development Act to provide affordable housing and community development for rural areas.
S. 2596/S.2597	Toricelli (NJ)	To extend and improve the Farmland Protection Program (FPP).
H.R. 4535	Watkins (OK)	Emergency Drought Relief Act of 1998.
H.R. 4690	Minge (MN)	To respond to the crisis in Agriculture.

NEXT WEEK -

Following completion of the federal funding responsibilities and expected enactment of the Omnibus Appropriations Bill, the 105th Congress will likely adjourn. Election day is November 3, 1998. The NRCS Legislative Affairs Staff will provide a summary of the Agriculture Spending Bill when it is signed into law, and will also provide a recap of conservation legislation in the 105th Congress.