



# Georgia Farm Bureau Federation **LEGISLATIVE REPORT**

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*Farmers Plant Georgia's Future*



Issue #

February 3, 2012

## **Legislative Board Committee**

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The General Assembly was in session for five days this week, leaving twenty-six more days for lawmakers this session. As the week came to a close, the House unanimously passed the amended budget for fiscal year 2012 on Friday.

## **Farm Bureau Testifies on Metal Theft**

On Thursday, the Senate Regulated Industries and Utilities committee heard testimony on Senate Bill 321 sponsored by Senator Renee Unterman. SB 321 would change how sales transactions of scrap metal are conducted. Under this proposal, secondary metal recyclers would not be allowed to make payments by cash; non-cash payments would be allowed after fourteen days. SB 321 would also establish an electronic database that would track selling and buying activities of scrap metals.

Madison County Farm Bureau member, Dennis Moon, testified at the committee hearing explaining how metal thefts have

impacted his area of the state. Moon stated that twelve county area poultry farmers have experienced eighty-two incidents with metal theft. Moon, impacted by this crime a year ago, described the impact of replacing the wire on his operation and the additional cost of not being able to put birds back in his houses until the repairs were made.

The Senate Regulated Industries and Utilities Committee is expected to take further action on SB 321 next week. The House also saw a bill introduced addressing metal theft. Representative Jason Shaw introduced a bill (HB 872) that requires recyclers to obtain permits and prohibits cash payments. In addition, the bill requires the recycler to obtain more information on the seller and transaction and makes the illegal sale of regulated metal a felony when the cost of stolen property and damage exceeds \$500.



# GFB Legislative Committee Goes to Capitol

The GFB Legislative Board Committee went to Atlanta on January 30-31 to spend a couple of days promoting Farm Bureau's legislative agenda and discussing agricultural issues.

GFB provided breakfast for a joint meeting of the combined Agriculture & Consumer Affairs Committees and other friends on Tuesday morning. President Duvall was recognized by Senate Chairman John Bulloch and House Chairman Tom McCall, after which Duvall was asked to address the group. He thanked legislators for their service, outlined GFB's priority issues, and urged legislators to utilize GFB's resources when considering issues of importance to farmers.

After breakfast, the committee met with Georgia Agriculture Commissioner Gary Black and several other members of the Department. Topics ranged from Vidalia onions to state farmers' markets, but most of the discussion centered on farm labor. Duvall thanked Black for his work to help quantify the extent of Georgia's farm labor shortage. The Commissioner noted the Department has been provided two additional employees to assist with labor issues. On February 9, Black will testify before the U.S. House Judiciary committee regarding H.R. 3443, the BARN Act, introduced by Congressmen Jack Kingston and Lynn Westmoreland. The BARN Act would reform the current H-2A guest worker program. GFB has urged members of the Georgia congressional delegation to cosponsor the legislation.



The committee met with new EPD Director Jud Turner, who was appointed to the position last month. Water was the topic of conversation. Duvall outlined GFB's water policy and offered to assist the new Director with any questions related to agricultural water use. "We want you to see us as a partner and a resource," said Duvall. The group discussed tri-state water negotiations, farmer NPDES permits, and regional water councils. Turner pledged his willingness to work cooperatively with farmers.



GFB is a member of the tax reform minded Coalition for a Competitive Georgia. Former state representative Richard Royal works with the coalition, and he met with the GFB leaders to discuss matters related to tax reform. Of particular interest is a sales tax exemption for energy used as a production input. While some hurdles remain, the issue will soon be brought up for discussion.

GFB hosted lunch for the General Assembly's Rural Caucus. The topic of discussion was how to combat the growing problem of metal theft. GFB joined forces with a couple of Burke County farmers to explain how damaging this crime has become in rural Georgia.

GFB was well received by legislators and government officials during the visit. "We appreciate the work done by the General Assembly and our state agencies, and it is gratifying to see them so open to our concerns," said President Duvall. "I also want to commend our GFB Legislative Board Committee for taking two days out of their busy schedules to come to Atlanta and do the business of Farm Bureau members."

# Farm Bureau Opposes Federal Poultry Legislation

On January 23, Rep. Kurt Schrader (D-OR) introduced H.R. 3798, the “Egg Products Inspection Act Amendments of 2012.” This legislation implements the agreement reached last summer by the United Egg Producers (UEP) and the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) regarding animal care standards for egg laying hens.

This legislation specifies a mandatory phase in to “enriched cage housing,” which has nearly double the space of conventional cages, for all commercial layers in the United States. The estimated cost of this action over the next 15 years is \$4 billion.

The enforcement section of the bill states that *“(c)(1) No person shall buy, sell, or transport, or offer to buy or sell, or offer or receive for transportation, in any business or commerce any eggs or egg products derived from egg-laying hens housed or treated in violation of any provision”* of the bill.

Farm Bureau opposes this legislation for several reasons, but one of the best arguments is that H.R. 3798 sets a dangerous precedent for the federal government to regulate the size of animal enclosures. If this legislation were to pass, the statute would be in place for amendment to include other livestock or poultry species.

Other arguments include the cost to producers to completely redesign their operations and the fact that there is no sound science suggesting that larger cages are any better than current cages. The care standards mandated in the bill are based largely on the political goals of HSUS which seeks to eventually eliminate animal agriculture altogether.

Currently, no Georgia Congressman has signed onto the bill. Farm Bureau encourages all members to contact their Congressman and express opposition to H.R. 3798, the “Egg Products Inspection Act Amendments of 2012.”

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## Georgia Agribusiness Council Hosts Annual Breakfast



The Georgia Agribusiness Council hosted their annual legislative breakfast on February 1. The event featured Governor Nathan Deal, Lieutenant Governor Casey Cagle, Speaker of the House David Ralston, Agriculture Commissioner Gary Black, Appropriations Committee Chairman Terry England, Senate Agriculture & Consumer Affairs Committee Chairman John Bulloch, and House Agriculture & Consumer Affairs Committee Chairman Tom McCall. The breakfast was an excellent event, and we were pleased to join our friends in promoting Georgia’s largest industry – agriculture!

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## Farm Bureau Day at the Capitol

Georgia Farm Bureau Day at the Capitol will be held on Tuesday, February 14, 2012. Although the legislature is scheduled to be in recess, we still expect a great event, and we encourage all members to contact and encourage their legislators to join us throughout the day. We are excited to have the Governor as our keynote speaker.

Orientation begins at 9:30 a.m. in the Blue Room at the Georgia Railroad Freight Depot, with lunch to follow at 11:30. Free parking is available at the Turner Field Gold Lot, with a shuttle service running from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

# Duvall Reappointed to Georgia Seed Development Commission

On February 1, the House Agriculture and Consumer Affairs committee reappointed President Zippy Duvall to the Georgia Seed Development Commission Board of Commissioners. The Georgia Seed



Development Commission is responsible for foundation plant material production in Georgia. It is administratively assigned to the Department of Agriculture and has an eleven member board. The Seed Commission has an active seed production program for most row crops in the state.

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## Bills of Interest

### **HB 564 – Solar Panels for CUVA**

**Representatives Billy Maddox, Jay Roberts, and Tom McCall**

This bill states that property used for the collection and conversion of solar energy shall not constitute a breach of a conservation use covenant. This bill was heard in the House Ways and Means committee this week.

### **HB 832 Vidalia Onion Royalties**

**Representative Tom McCall**

This bill repeals the five cent per six ounce royalty associated with Vidalia onions. It replaces this with a royalty to be negotiated by the Commissioner of Agriculture. This bill passed favorably out of the Agriculture and Consumer Affairs committee.

### **HB 843 Farm to School Initiative**

**Representatives Benfield, Ashe, Kaiser, Dobbs, Oliver, and Wilkerson**

This bill calls for the promotion and use of Georgia-grown farm products in county and independent school districts in the state. *Agriculture and Consumer Affairs.*

### **HB 853 Right to Grow**

**Representatives Ehrhart, McCall, England, Roberts, and Drenner**

This bill would prevent local ordinances relating to the production of agricultural or farm products. It would protect the right to grow crops and raise small animals on private property as long as those crops and animals are for the growers' own consumption and not for commercial use. *Agriculture and Consumer Affairs.*

### **SB 301 Silencers on Hunting Firearms**

**Senators Bulloch, Tolleson, Shafer, Rogers, and Mullis**

This bill allows for the use of silencers on hunting firearms. It passed the Senate with a vote of 48-5. It now heads to the House Game, Fish, and Parks committee.

### **SB 357 Treated Timber Act Repeal**

**Senators Wilkinson, Bulloch, Heath, Miller, Mullis, and Gooch**

This bill would repeal the "Georgia Treated Timber Products Act of 1973." This bill regulated the treating of timber products, but since the bill passed in 1973, the federal government passed regulations, making Georgia's regulations unnecessary. This bill passed favorably through the Agriculture and Consumer Affairs committee.

# Bills of Interest, cont.

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## **SB 367 Bond Requirements for Department of Agriculture Fines**

**Senators Bulloch, Ginn, Wilkinson, Miller, and Heath**

This bill would allow the Commissioner of Agriculture the option to require a person who has been issued a fine to carry a bond for the fined amount. IF the violating party fails to follow the terms of the consent order, the Commissioner may commence an action against the surety bond. *Agriculture and Consumer Affairs.*

## **SB 374 Tennessee River Basin Water Transfers**

**Senators Mullis, Bethel, Hill, Gooch, and Shafer**

This bill would exempt the withdrawal of surface water from any point within the Tennessee River basin in the Chickamauga Valley and Lookout Mountain districts from any restriction on water transfers. *Natural Resources and the Environment.*

## **SR 673 Balanced Budget Amendment**

**Senators Cowsert, Rogers, Williams, Mullis, Staton, and Goggans**

This resolution calls for the U.S. Congress to call an amendment convention of the states in order to add a balanced budget amendment to the U.S. Constitution. *Government Oversight.*

## **SR 715 State Guest Worker Program**

**Senators T. Williams, Crosby, J. Hill, Ligon, B. Jackson, and McKoon**

This resolution urges Congress to allow states to administer their own H-2A guest worker programs through the United States Department of Agriculture. This resolution passed favorably through the Agriculture and Consumer Affairs committee.

## **SR 766 Balanced Budget Amendment**

**Senators Hill, Rogers, Loudermilk, Mullis, and Shafer**

This resolution urges Congress to pass and submit to the states an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that requires Congress to balance the federal budget, except in the case of national emergencies. *Government Oversight.*

## **SR 781 Urging Feasibility Study on Water Use in Tennessee River Basin**

**Senators Mullis, Bethel, Hill, Gooch, and Shafer**

This resolution urges the Department of Natural Resources, the Water Supply Division of the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority, and private businesses to study the feasibility of surface water withdrawal, storage, and distribution in northwest Georgia on the Tennessee River basin. *Natural Resources and the Environment.*

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*Thanks for reading. If you have any questions or if we can be of any assistance, please contact the Legislative Department at (478) 474-8411 ext. 5283.*