



Georgia Farm Bureau Federation LEGISLATIVE REPORT

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Farm Bureau Day at the Capitol

Tuesday, February 10th

Join us at the Capitol this Tuesday and let your voice be heard for agriculture. The orientation begins at 9:30 a.m. in the Blue Room at the Freight Depot, and the luncheon starts at 11:30. **Governor Sonny Perdue** will be our keynote speaker. Parking is available in the Gold Lot at Turner Field, and shuttle service runs from 8:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. Everything's free.



Governor Perdue

Budget Woes

State revenue collections are down and all indications are that new numbers will be worse than expected. Every day, a new group is at the Capitol protesting cuts to their respective programs. Clearly, these are trying times for legislators who are mandated by the Georgia Constitution to pass a balanced budget.

Earlier today, the House & Senate passed resolutions agreeing to meet Tuesday through Thursday each week until the 35th legislative day of the 40-day session. After day 35, the Legislature will recess until the final week of June to allow for lawmakers to make budget and spending adjustments before the new fiscal year begins on July 1. The intent is not to actually wait until June to finish, but to give lawmakers flexibility in what is proving to be a tough budget situation.

Priority Issues Update

Water ► Last August, Georgia Farm Bureau submitted 88 names for consideration of appointment to the regional water councils authorized in the new water plan. Those appointments will be made by **Governor Sonny Perdue, Lt. Governor Casey Cagle, and House Speaker Glenn Richardson**. At this week's Georgia Agribusiness Council's legislative breakfast, **Governor Perdue** stated the "*appointments are imminent.*" He explained the delay is partly due to the overlap of the names being considered. GFB has been in contact with the offices of Perdue, Cagle, and Richardson encouraging them to have strong farm representation on the councils.

Budget & Taxes ► A couple pieces of legislation intending to avoid back taxes progressed this week. **Rep. Jay Roberts' HB 46** passed the House yesterday 164-0. This bill ratifies the sales tax suspension on off-road fuel ordered by **Governor Perdue** last May, keeping it in place through **May 31, 2009**. Without this ratification, farmers could be billed for sales tax not collected on their off-road fuel purchases. **HB 46** now heads to the Senate for consideration.

Rep. Larry O'Neal's HB 143 passed the House last Friday by a vote of 117-55 and passed the Senate this morning by a narrow margin. It addresses homeowner tax relief grants by funding the program this year, but changing the program next year tying it to state revenue collections. The intent of **HB 143** is to avoid county governments sending additional 2008 tax bills to homeowners. It puts county officials on notice that the program will be changed for 2009 and beyond.

Transportation ► Funding for transportation is being debated in both chambers, both calling for an additional 1% sales tax, both requiring constitutional amendments, and both bills being authored by the chairmen of the respective Transportation Committees. **Rep. Vance Smith's HB 277** is a statewide plan calling for an additional 1% state sales tax, and it outlines dozens of specific transportation projects that will be funded by the additional revenue. **HB 277** will be up for consideration in subcommittee next week. **Sen. Jeff Mullis' SB 39** passed the Senate this week by a vote of 52-3. It calls for multiple counties to voluntarily form regional transportation districts and determine regional transportation needs. Those districts would then develop the plans and be authorized to place a **T-SPLOST** (Transportation-Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax) on the ballot within the district to fund the plans. **SB 39** is currently under consideration in the House Transportation Committee.

► Both bills have merit and newly adopted GFB policy calls for the "*General Assembly to develop a plan to adequately fund transportation projects in Georgia.*" **HB 277** and **SB 39** both contain provisions that all current sales tax exemptions apply. **SB 39** includes a provision that off-road diesel is also exempt.

Farmer Initiatives ► **Sen. John Bulloch's SB 43** passed the Senate Thursday by a vote of 49-0. This bill pertains to the **Boll Weevil Eradication Program (BWEP)** and provides the mechanism for the collection of farmer assessments in case those assessments are changed from the current per acre basis to a per bale basis. **SB 43** does not require changing the basis of the assessment, but recent changes in Farm Service Agency (FSA) procedures increase the likelihood of a per bale assessment. **SB 43** clarifies that ginners are considered "first handlers" and would be responsible for collecting the per bale assessment from farmers and remitting it to the Commissioner of Agriculture.



Boll Weevil Trap

Immigration ► At this point, there does not appear to be much activity on this issue in the Georgia legislature. We believe that to be positive development on this particular subject.

Food Safety & Peanuts

In light of the recent peanut issues, **Sen. John Bulloch** introduced **SB 80** to address food safety and inspections. The bill is co-sponsored by Senators Dickey Crosby, George Hooks, Ross Tolleson, Ralph Hudgens, & Freddie Sims. The bill sets additional testing requirements for “food sales establishments.” It also requires that if contamination is detected, the establishment must report the finding to the Georgia Department of Agriculture no later than the next business day.

Consumers’ confidence in their food supply is paramount to farmers, not only because farmers work hard to provide a wholesome product, but also because a loss of that confidence is an economic disaster for farmers. As Governor Perdue said in his comments Wednesday morning, “*In the food chain, we all share one another’s reputation whether we’re a farmer, handler, processor, shipper, or retailer.*” Rep. Tom McCall said, “*Now it’s our job to reassure folks that it’s safe to eat peanuts.*”

Metals Theft

Metal theft has been an issue for many years, but has escalated over the past few years due to higher metal prices. GFB is working diligently towards a solution with a coalition including numerous associations, councils, and law enforcement officials. The following is a comparative outline of three current proposals:

► **HB 43- Scrap Metal ID Requirements- Representatives Mitchell & Jordan-** The purpose of this bill is to curb metal theft. Farmers are increasingly victimized by this problem as valuable equipment is rendered worthless by thieves stripping away copper and other metals. This bill would require non-licensed sellers of scrap metal be at least 18 years old, provide a government issued photo ID, vehicle tag number, current address, and date of birth. The buyer of the metal would be required to retain the information for two years. ***Judiciary, Non-civil***

► **HB 177- Secondary Metals Recyclers- Representatives Williams, Ramsey, Smith, Meadows, England-** This bill requires secondary metals recyclers to maintain a record of purchase transactions including the name and address of the secondary metals recycler, the date, the weight, quantity, or volume of metal as well as a description, a signed statement of rightful ownership, a copy of their driver’s license, the vehicle’s license plate number and vehicle description, and a description of the source where the seller obtained the metal. After July 1, 2009 the recycler (buyer) is required to transmit a copy of the information to the local sheriff’s department. This bill also stipulates that the buyer may pay cash only for transactions under \$50, anything about \$50 must be paid for by check. ***Judiciary, Non-civil***

► **SB 82- Secondary Metals Recyclers- Senators Unterman, Chance and Staton-** This bill is identical to HB 177 however it also adds that the secondary metals recycler shall not purchase regulated metal property from minors except for aluminum cans. City and county owned sewer and manhole covers are also prohibited from purchase. Property that is primarily copper cannot be purchased with cash. ***Regulated Industries & Utilities***