



ASN Health and Nutrition Public Policy Newsletter May 20, 2008

CONGRESSIONAL ACTION

Congress passes Farm Bill, President maintains veto threat

Last week, Congress passed the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008, otherwise known as the Farm Bill. The legislation, which is projected to cost \$289 billion over the next five years, was passed by an overwhelming majority in both the House and the Senate. President Bush has vowed to veto the bill, citing high costs and inadequate reform. However, the strong votes in both chambers suggest that Congress easily will override a Presidential veto. It is unclear when the veto will take place, but it is likely that Congress will not take up the measure again until it returns on June 3 from the Memorial Day recess.

ASN praises passage of nutrition monitoring provisions in the Farm Bill...

For the first time in over 15 years, language reauthorizing joint national nutrition monitoring activities has been approved by Congress. Inclusion of this language in the Farm Bill was one of ASN's top priorities, and it reaffirms the nation's commitment to continuing this important program. "Nutrition monitoring is a unique and vitally important surveillance function that tracks dietary intake and evaluates the health and nutritional status of the U.S. population. The data collected critically inform nutrition policy and all nutrition programs, including those supported by the Farm Bill," said ASN President Joanne Lupton.

While urging more funding for food and nutrition research

Despite promising structural changes included in the bill aimed at bolstering competitive research at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) while maintaining essential capacity and infrastructure programs (outlined below), the continued lack of federal support for food, nutrition and agricultural research is of great concern. "The time has come to commit resources to ensure food, nutrition and agricultural research keeps pace in the 21st century," said Lupton. "We look forward to working with members of Congress to ensure that research programs authorized under the Farm Bill are funded at a level required to address current public health needs."

Additional nutrition and research highlights from the Farm Bill

Key provisions related to research and nutrition programs include:

Establishment of a National Institute for Food and Agriculture at USDA to support competitive research at USDA. The NIFA would replace the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES).

Replacement of the National Research Initiative (NRI) and the Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems (IFAFS) with the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI). The AFRI is authorized at \$700 million annually (previously, NRI = \$500 million, IFAFS = \$200 million). AFRI is divided into six priority areas and maintains a focus on nutrition and health.

The Research, Education and Extension Office (REEO) is reorganized into 6 divisions led by Division Chiefs. One Division is devoted to food safety, nutrition and health.

The REEO is charged with developing a Roadmap for Agricultural research.

A specific member category for the NAREEE Advisory Board is established for a representative from a national nutritional science society.

An additional \$10.361 billion above the bill's baseline was added for nutrition programs, most notably the Food Stamp Program, renamed the "Secure Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program" (SSNAP). Also included is a SSNAP pilot program to encourage purchase of fruits and vegetables.

\$1.02 billion for the USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program, that helps schools provide healthy snacks to students outside of lunch and expands the program to all 50 states.

Unfortunately, there is no new or mandatory funding for research beyond that included for bioenergy, specialty crops and organic farming. The competitive grants are, however, re-authorized at current levels and the Managers' Statement accompanying the legislation included supportive language and directions for research funding.

Additional details can be found [on our website](#). Legislative language and other congressional documents can be found on the [House Agriculture Committee website](#) or the [Senate Agriculture Committee website](#).

Senate includes funding for research in War Supplemental

This week the Senate will take up a supplemental appropriations bill to fund the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The measure, however, goes beyond war funding to include increased funding for domestic programs, as well as war policy provisions. The domestic funding provisions include substantial increases for research across the federal government, including the following:

- \$400 million for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) (This would fund an additional 700 research grants)

- \$400 million for the Department of Energy's Office of Science

- \$275 million for the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

- \$200 million for the National Science Foundation

- \$200 million for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Efforts to pass similar legislation fell apart in the House last week; therefore, it is unclear when the supplemental would go to the President. Bush has repeatedly stated he will veto a bill that provides any funding other than that requested for Iraq and Afghanistan, and/or that includes language dictating a troop withdrawal from Iraq.

House and Senate reach agreement on FY 2009 Budget Resolution

For the first time since 2000, Congress has agreed to a budget blueprint during an election year. House Budget Committee Chairman John Spratt Jr. (D-SC) and Senate Budget Committee Chairman Kent Conrad (D-ND) have reached a fiscal year (FY) 2009 budget agreement that both chambers are expected to pass. The agreement spends \$20 million more than the President requested and attempts to do away with the alternative minimum tax (AMT) that could affect 20 million families next April. The extra funds go towards education, energy, and veteran's benefits and some of Bush's tax cuts would be allowed to expire in 2010. Adoption of a budget resolution clears the way for appropriators to move FY 2009 spending bills.

However, during an election year, work on federal appropriations often grinds to a halt. Congressional elections combined with an exciting Presidential campaign and a President unwilling to sign spending bills that exceed his request, creates an environment that is not conducive to passage of spending bills. It remains likely that a Continuing Resolution will be passed later in the year to fund the federal government at FY 2008 levels through early 2009. According to one source,

2008 marks the first year since the 1974 Budget Act was created that Congress has “essentially given up on the appropriations process for the year before it has even begun.”

ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION

NIH to host webinar on Research, Condition, and Disease Categorization (RCDC) system

The NIH is hosting a webinar June 11 to introduce the new Research, Condition, and Disease Categorization (RCDC) system. This new computer-based tool will allow users to see how the NIH categorizes its research in nearly 360 categories representing research areas, diseases, and conditions. During the webinar, Alan Krensky, MD, Director of the NIH Office of Portfolio Analysis and Strategic Initiatives (OPASI) and Tim Hays, PhD, RCDC Project Director in OPASI will explain the RCDC system and then lead an open discussion.

Next spring, NIH will post the first RCDC reports from fiscal year 2008-funded research on a public website. If you are interested in joining the webinar, please RSVP by Friday, June 6, 2008, to rcdcpublicinfo@mail.nih.gov. Questions may be submitted in advance to rcdcpublicinfo@mail.nih.gov, and more information and updates can be found at <http://rcdc.nih.gov>.

CDC announces community health funding opportunity

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announce the opportunity for state-level entities and tribal and local communities to apply for funds to advance, implement, and sustain evidence and practice-based chronic disease community programs. These programs will promote policy, organizational, systems and environmental community change. Specifically, this initiative will serve to:

- Promote physical activity and nutrition;
- Reduce tobacco use and exposure;
- Build capacity for communities to be able to institute systems, environmental, organizational and policy changes related to these health risk factors;
- Foster improved and increased access to quality care;
- Help eliminate racial and ethnic health disparities; and
- Reduce complications from and incidence of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and obesity.

Communities funded under this program will work collaboratively to develop policy, systems, and environment changes that will promote and sustain community-based health promotion prevention programs of sufficient intensity and duration to help achieve the "Healthy People 2010" objectives. More details about this funding opportunity can be found on the [CDC website](#).

FDA extends health claim on soluble fiber

As of May 1, FDA amended its regulation authorizing a health claim on the relationship between soluble fiber from certain foods and risk of coronary heart disease (CHD). The amendment, which was driven by a petition from PepsiCo's Quaker Oats Company, exempts certain foods from the nutrient content requirement of 'low fat.' Previously, Quaker Oats' reduced sugar products were not entitled to the claim because they did not meet the 'low fat' requirement. However, these products only have a naturally higher fat content because by reducing sugar, the products contain more whole oats - and fat-- from these whole oats.

For more information about the updated soluble fiber health claim, go to the [FDA website](#).

FDA survey suggests Americans are not changing their diets

The FDA's Health and Diet Survey: Dietary Guidelines Supplement tracked American attitudes, knowledge and behavior regarding nutrition and physical activity. The survey findings indicate that although Americans believe healthy eating habits are important, sometimes knowledge and good intentions do not add up to making better choices and changing behavior. Not surprising, there are differences in how Americans view their health and what is important to them related to their gender, age and education. Most respondents agreed with the statements, "Healthy eating habits are very important to me" (95 percent) and "I am actively trying to eat a healthy diet" (90 percent), but their reported intake of whole grains, milk products, fruits and vegetables, and avoidance of saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, carbohydrates, sodium and sugar revealed mixed adherence to attitudes and intentions."

The survey also inquired where Americans turn for nutrition information, how reliable they consider Federal government nutrition information, how easy they think it is to access the information, and their familiarity with specific government nutrition offerings such as the Dietary Guidelines.

For more information about the results of this survey, visit [the FDA website](#).

ERS report analyzes global factors contributing to the recent increase in food commodity prices

A recent report from the USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) considered the many factors that have contributed to the more than 60 percent increase in just 2 years of world market prices for major food commodities such as grains and vegetable oils. Some factors reflect trends of slower growth in production and more rapid growth in demand, which have contributed to a tightening of world balances of grains and oilseeds over the last decade. Recent factors that have further tightened world markets include increased global demand for biofuels, feedstocks, and adverse weather conditions. Other factors that have added to price inflation include the declining value of the U.S. dollar, rising energy prices, increasing agricultural costs of production, growing foreign exchange holdings by major food importing countries, and policies adopted recently by some exporting and importing countries to mitigate their own food price inflation.

For more information about rising food commodity prices, visit the [Economic Research Service website](#).

NATIONAL INITIATIVES

IOM to Review the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) has appointed an expert committee to review and recommend revisions to the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and National School Breakfast Program (SBP) for USDA. Several ASN members are among those serving on this important committee. A description of the project and a list of the committee members can be found on the [National Academy of Sciences website](#). The first meeting of the committee will be held in June.

Campaign to End Obesity releases a "Congressional Call to Action"

The Campaign to End Obesity released "[A Call to Action: What Congress can do to address the obesity epidemic in 2008 and beyond.](#)" The report highlights what can be done to address obesity in the policy areas of education, finance, transportation, agriculture, appropriations, healthcare, and research. With respect to research, the report recommends the following actions:

Provide a significant increase in the federal investment in obesity prevention, management and treatment research via the NIH, CDC, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, the Agricultural Research Service, ERS, and CSREES at USDA.

Call on the next Administration to unite the federal government in a coordinated national strategy to address obesity.

For more information, please visit the [Campaign's website](#).

Children's TV and online programming platform adopts nutritional guidelines for advertisers

Qubo has announced nutritional guidelines for its on-air and online advertising. The bilingual, multi-platform children's program airs on NBC, ION Television and Telemundo. The nutritional standards state that Qubo should accept food advertising only from companies that meet criteria for calories, total fat, saturated and trans fat, sugar, protein, fiber, and sodium. Although Qubo currently has no food advertisers, officials expect that the guidelines may encourage companies that make healthy foods to advertise on the channel.

More information about the proposed guidelines can be found on the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation website](#).

Questions about this newsletter? Please contact Mary Lee Watts, ASN Director of Public Policy and Communications, at (301) 634-7112 or mwatts@nutrition.org.

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