GROWERTALKS

JZ on D.C.

5/1/2019

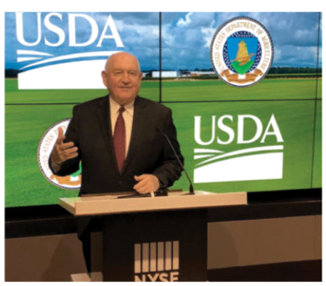
Registration is Now Open for the Impact Washington Summit

Jennifer Zurko

Registration and hotels are now open for the Impact Washington Summit being held on September 16-19, 2019 in Washington D.C. During this two-day advocacy summit, green industry business owners and leaders will hear from elected leaders, their staff and other policy experts on issues of great importance to their business' success. Attendees will share their experience directly with policymakers, providing real-world context and influence on the decisions being made.

Providing a united front, this is an opportunity for the entire green industry to personally and collectively advocate for decisions that help us continue the growth of our $193 billion industry.

To register and reserve your hotel, go to americanhort.org.



Ringing the NYSE Opening Bell

AmericanHort and one of its member companies participated in
the ringing of the New York Stock Exchange opening bell with Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue on March 19.

Ed and Gail Overdevest of Overdevest Nurseries in Bridgeton,New Jersey, along with AmericanHort Director of Government Affairs Tal Coley, attended the ceremony. In addition to AmericanHort, Secretary Perdue was joined by other leading trade associations in agriculture.

Picured above left: AmericanHort members Gail and Ed Overdevest (center and right) and AmericanHort Director of Government Affairs Tal Coley (left) were invited to attend the opening bell ceremony of the New York Stock Exchange with U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Purdue in March.

Above right: U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Purdue addresses agricultural community members prior to the opening bell ceremony of the New York Stock Exchange.

Agency Acknowledges Trucking Changes Coming for Agricultural Commodities

Confirming recent intelligence received by the advocacy team in Washington, D.C., the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) finally acknowledged at a trucking trade show in late March that there will be an Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPRM) focused on clarifying and defining what an agricultural product actually is.

Highlighted in Freightwaves, a trucking industry magazine, FMCSA official Joe DeLorenzo stated that there is no timetable on the release yet, but the agency has been working with the Department of Agriculture to create a framework for the regulation.

This is a huge positive step for our industry. In meetings in late 2017 and throughout 2018 with the AmericanHort advocacy team, FMCSA officials were noncommittal as to potentially helpful rule changes.

Once the ANPRM is issued, AmericanHort will file extensive comments to make the case for the clear inclusion of nursery and floriculture crops within the definition of “agricultural commodity.” Until then, all efforts will be focused on garnering wide support for the recently-introduced Agricultural Trucking Relief Act (H.R.1673) and bringing steady attention to the issue.

On March 22, AmericanHort placed an op-ed in the Washington, D.C.- based publication RealClearPolicy detailing the current situation faced by the horticulture industry concerning the vague agricultural exemption associated with the Electronic Logging Device (ELD) mandate.

Entitled “Congress Must Clarify Trucking Regulations for Agricultural Products," we lay out the problems with the current definition, why horticulture should be explicitly included and how a recently introduced bill by Rep. Austin Scott (R-GA) would address the issue.

The bipartisan bill—The Agricultural Trucking Relief Act of 2019 (H.R.1673)—currently has five co-sponsors, with Representative Rob Woodall (R-GA), a member of the House Transportation Committee and the Highway Subcommittee, joining in support last week.

AmericanHort also launched grassroots activity on this issue, aiming to increase co-sponsorship of the legislation. If you’d like to send an email to your Representative in the House, go to tinyurl.com/truckingrelief.

—Tal Coley, Director of Government Affairs, AmericanHort

Industry ADVOCATES: Society of American Florists

Major Social Security Changes Considered

Legislation that would dramatically increase Social Security taxes and benefits has been introduced in the House and Senate.

Chairman of the House Ways and Means Social Security Subcommittee John Larson (D-CT) has introduced H.R. 860, the Social Security 2100 Act. Under the legislation the Social Security tax rate for both the employer and the employee would gradually increase beginning in 2020 through 2043 from 6.2% to 7.4%.

The bill would also impose new payroll taxes. Today, wages over $132,900 per year are not subject to payroll taxes. H.R. 860 would continue to impose payroll taxes on wages up to $132,900, but would also then start imposing payroll taxes again on all wages above $400,000.

The increased payroll taxes are meant to address the solvency of the Social Security “Trust Fund” for the next 75 years and to provide increased benefits. H.R. 860 would increase Social Security benefits for all recipients by an amount equal to 2% of the average benefit, increase the annual cost of living adjustment formula, establish a new minimum benefit—which would be 25% above the poverty line—and tax Social Security benefits if non-Social Security benefits exceed $50,000 per year for individuals or $100,000 for couples.

Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) introduced similar legislation—S. 478, the Social Security Expansion Act—in the Senate. S. 478 would create new payroll taxes on all wages above $250,000 per year rather than $400,000 as the House bill would. The Senate bill would also increase benefits for low-income workers by approximately $1,300 per year and provide benefits to full-time students under 23 who are children of disabled or deceased parents.

No action has taken place on either bill. It’s possible that H.R. 860 may be approved by the Democrat-controlled House, but neither bill is likely to be considered in the Republican-controlled Senate.

Shawn McBurney, Senior Director —Government Relations, SAF

Industry ADVOCATES: AmericanHort

At Last, H-2B Cap Relief Coming

AmericanHort is very pleased to report that on March 29, the Department of Homeland Security announced that it plans to release an additional 30,000 H-2B visas for returning immigrant workers. This progress would not have happened without the steady advocacy push by our staff, leaders and members, state association partners, and like-minded industries participating in the H-2B Workforce Coalition, which we co-chair.

Though this number of additional visas is less than half the 69,320 additional visas Congress authorized, and certainly falls well short of current demand, it is double the number that have been made available in the past two fiscal years. The 30,000 visas will be made available via a temporary final rule that will be published in the Federal Register. These additional visas will certainly provide some relief for our members who were shut out of the H-2B program this year due to the cap.

We will provide additional information once the rule is published in the Federal Register.

—Craig Regelbrugge, VP of Government Relations & Research, AmericanHort