GROWERTALKS

JZ on D.C.

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AmericanHort Meets with DOL & USDA

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In May, AmericanHort CEO and President Ken Fisher participated in a roundtable discussion with USDA Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack and DOL Acting Secretary Julie A. Su on the recently released H-2A Farmworker Protection Final Rule.

The final rule went into effect on June 28, 2024, with a further delayed implementation date of August 29, 2024, to allow the Department of Labor (DOL) to update the Foreign Labor Application Gateway (FLAG) system and forms.

What has AmericanHort been doing on this effort?

■ Shared comments with key DOL officials last November expressing several concerns about the proposed rule

■ Held several meetings with DOL and USDA officials and staff

■ Held meetings with numerous Members of Congress, staff and committee staff

■ Facilitated meetings for AmericanHort members and Members of Congress, their staff and committee staff in Washington, D.C., and at AmericanHort facilities

■ On June 20, AmericanHort hosted a webinar examining the new rule, its effects and how to best prepare to implement the changes it sets forth (the recorded version can be found on americanhort.org)

GO HERE to see the breakdown of the rule to better understand it and how it may affect your business.

—Source: AmericanHort's Capitol Wire newsletter

Some Movement on the Farm Bill

There's been some recent and encouraging action on the Farm Bill, more formally known as the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2024 (H.R. 8467). On May 24, the House Committee on Agriculture approved the bill by a 33 -21 bipartisan vote. The House Farm Bill, as it stands, includes significant spending increases and policy wins for several important programs and initiatives that SAF has been advocating for on the Hill, including:

■ A $15 million increase for Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to help prevent, detect and eradicate existing and new invasive pests and diseases (e.g., invasive fruit flies, Asian Longhorned Beetle, etc.)

■ A $50 million increase for Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) and $20 million in funding for an SCRI mechanization program, which would bring cutting-edge innovation in plant breeding, crop protection and automation to horticultural crops

■ A $15 million increase for Block Grants to enhance competitiveness of the specialty crop industry by supporting state-led efforts in crop research and domestic marketing

■ Expanding crop insurance access for specialty crop growers by creating an advisory committee, improving the Whole Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP) policies, and researching and developing new policies specific to specialty crops

■ Eliminating Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) limitations for operations that derive 75% or more of their income from agriculture—giving floriculture growers more access to federally supported conservation programs that help meet irrigation, erosion and other sustainability needs

You can read more about the specialty crop provisions included in the Farm Bill HERE.

—Lillie Wightman, Society of American Florists

U.S. Agricultural Trade: Rising Imports Spark Concern

The latest data from USDA's Economic Research Service reveals concerning trends in U.S. agricultural trade. The trade deficit is expected to reach $32 billion in the 2024 fiscal year, up by $1.5 billion from previous projections. While exports remained steady at $170.5 billion, imports surged to $202.5 billion, primarily driven by an increase in imported fresh fruits and vegetables.

The rise in specialty crop imports highlights the nation's increasing dependence on foreign sources for produce. Industry experts, including John Kran from the Michigan Farm Bureau, are calling for fair trade practices and support for domestic farmers to address this issue. John emphasizes the need for solutions, such as pausing the H-2A program's Adverse Effect Wage Rate, highlighting that American farmers can compete globally when there's a level playing field and fair labor prices.

The shift is stark—30 years ago, only 14% of fresh fruit in the U.S. was imported, which now hovers around 50% and is projected to reach nearly 70% by 2040.

—Source: AmericanHort's Capitol Wire newsletter

House Moves to Appropriations Bills

House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA-04) aims to pass all 12 annual spending bills through the House before the August recess, a challenging goal given the difficulties Republicans faced last year. House GOP leaders seem to be learning from past mistakes by avoiding highly contentious policy issues. For example, the ban on mail delivery of abortion pills, which derailed last year's efforts, might not be pushed again.

Moderate Republicans are pressuring leadership to drop controversial riders to ensure the passage of funding bills.

However, balancing the demands of moderates and conservatives remains a challenge.

The primary issues last year were not only funding levels but also contentious policy language, particularly concerning abortion. Despite higher funding totals this year, the House GOP leaders will likely face similar obstacles. Rep. Steve Womack (R-AR-03) believes the conference has learned from last year's struggles and expects more than seven bills to pass but acknowledges the challenges ahead. The goal remains ambitious, and the outcome is uncertain as Republicans navigate internal divisions.

—Matt Mika, VP of Advocacy & Government Affairs, AmericanHort

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Contact Your Congressional Rep on H-2B

A call to action from the H-2B Workforce Coalition in Washington, D.C., as they recommend emailing your Member of Congress and ask him or her to encourage House Appropriations Committee leaders to amend the FY 25 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations bill by changing the word "may" to "shall."

By making this minor change from "may" to "shall," we'll maintain the status quo from the previous two years, expedite the process to access the supplemental visas and provide much needed certainty for seasonal businesses.

—Tal Coley, Florida Nursery, Growers & Landscapers Association

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Republicans Prepare to Fast-Track Tax Cuts in Reconciliation

Republicans are taking steps to prepare for their first actions should they gain control of Congress and the White House in November. One of the top items on their list would be to use budget reconciliation to extend the Trump tax cuts set to expire in 2026.

Republicans are organizing working groups within the House Ways and Means Committee to address various tax issues while being mindful of the reconciliation's procedural limits. However, there's debate among Republicans about the corporate tax rate, with some advocating for further cuts and others suggesting an increase.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates that extending the tax cuts through 2034 would significantly increase the deficit. Revenue-raising measures to offset the cost are still under discussion, with some proposals, like canceling the employee retention tax credit, facing obstacles in the Senate.

—Source: AmericanHort's Capitol Wire newsletter

News, views, commentary and event coverage about the policies and legislation that directly affect our industry. Share your thoughts, opinions and news with me: jzurko@ballpublishing.com.