

Rice Outlook Conference

Watchdogs Look Over Shoulders As Farm Bill Goes Through Rule Making Process

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LITTLE ROCK, ARK.

Concern at the USA Rice Outlook Conference held recently in Little Rock was to make sure that the intent of Congress in writing the Farm Bill is carried forward into the rule making process. Several speakers focused on this issue.

"The real focus is getting the Farm Bill regulations written so that they follow the intent of Congress, and also to keep funding for the Farm Bill," said James Warshaw, chairman of USA Rice Federation. "We know we've got some challenges – the economy, the budget – and we just have to stay focused on making sure agriculture stays healthy and we can keep a farm bill that supports our agriculture."

Sen. Blanche Lincoln (D-AR) admitted that not everything requested was authorized by this Farm Bill.

"We worked hard on that farm bill and we had the best outcome we possibly could," Lincoln said. "The problem now becomes implementation, and we're fighting hard to ensure that the intent that we had when we wrote that farm bill is actually what the administration and USDA will actually end up implementing."

She said it was a hard fought battle to get the benefits and reminders were needed on a continual basis that the United States is the third largest rice exporter globally.

"That does a tremendous job in terms of economic stability," Lincoln said. "With the enormous trade deficit that we have right now, agriculture is our one and only saving grace because we still have a trade surplus in agriculture."

Lincoln also added that she is working to make sure this country makes more of an effort to do business with Cuba.

"There's no reason why we shouldn't be trading with Cuba," she said. "The Cuban people

some ups and downs," she said. "The rice prices were high and now we're in a little bit of a downturn. I think we've got some good market opportunities, particularly I'm optimistic about Cuba, hopeful that we can do some good work in Washington with the new administration to get some changes there. I know the Cubans are also hopeful. Some of our other markets are still going great. Mexico is still a fantastic market for us so I think overall we're trying to keep doing what we do for the industry which is to help them remain profitable and stay in business."

"We're continuing to push the Europeans to open their market," she added. "It's been slow going but we're making steady progress. We're focusing some efforts on the communications side so we can do a better job on grassroots communication."

Warshaw opened the program by introducing Governor Mike Beebe, who noted that Arkansas is the number one rice producing state in the nation.



Sen. Blanche Lincoln

"It is an industry that generates more than \$1,000,000,000 to our economy here in Arkansas and when you're talking about \$1,000,000,000 with a 'b' it's no small change," he said. "It's something that obviously we put at the forefront of our economic activity."

Some 750 people were in attendance. Attendance hasn't been that high since the last time the program was held in Little Rock.

"Extremely good turnout," Warshaw said. "Arkansas is a great place to host this convention. With an excess of 700 people attending, I think we have a good format."

A group from Mexico was in attendance this year.

"We have a delegation of seven Mexicans here," he continued. "They are all customers of US rice and, as we know, Mexico is the largest customer for US rice. They take both rough and milled rice and we're proud to have them with us."



loved our rice in the '40s and '50s, there's no doubt about that. Being 90 miles from our borders, it's a no brainer in terms of a great place for us to be able to access trade and open markets."

As the third largest rice exporter in the world, the United States does have one advantage.

"The other two exporters above us, most of them farm a rice crop using water from resources that have direct sewage access," she pointed out. "I talk to people from other countries who don't want rice from those countries because sometimes it makes their people sick."

Betsy Ward, president and CEO of USA Rice Federation, added her comments about the rice market. "Obviously we've been through



Betsy Ward

Among the speakers at the conference was Richard A. Brock, owner and president of Brock Associates, who addressed the impact of the financial crisis on commodity prices, farming and agribusiness. He discussed the future of the grain market and which marketing tools to use to manage the crisis.

Jim Wiesemeyer, vice president of Informa Economics, gave a Washington insider's view of the situation. Rice awards were presented. Rice Foundation Chairman Marvin Hare provided information on the Rice Leadership Development Program.

State production outlook reports were given for the rice producing states. Sessions on fertilizer, weed control and conservation rounded out the program. Δ



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