

Ariana Taylor-Stanley, Tilth Producers, Seattle

STATE POLICY

Summer in-district meetings

Tilth Producers hosted two meetings this summer to connect farmers with legislative staff for conversations on priority issues at member farms. Senator Patty Murray's State Director Mindi Linquist joined the tour and discussion at Boldbrook Farm in Sultan, WA, focused on the Young Farmer Success Act. Senator Murray is a key decision-maker on the issue as Ranking Member of the Senate education committee. Director Linquist expressed support for the idea of helping beginning farmers with their student debt. Contact Senator Murray's office to urge her support for adding farmers to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program.

Tilth Producers also hosted Congressman Dan Newhouse's DC-based agriculture staffer Kyle Kunkler at Cloudview Ecofarms and Baird Orchards in Royal City, WA. That conversation focused on the Farm to School Act and organic practices—both priority issues for farmer Jim Baird who sells to several local school districts, and who has used organic practices for decades. While he has declined to cosponsor the Farm to School Act, Congressman Newhouse has committed to work with colleagues to include more support for farm-to-school work in the Child Nutrition Act Reauthorization process.

FEDERAL POLICY

GE Labeling

In July, the US House of Representatives passed HR 1599, which prevents state-level labeling or regulation of genetically engineered (GE or GMO) food. It is considered unlikely at this time that the Senate will pass a companion bill—necessary for the bill to become law. See the response at right for more on HR 1599.

Also in July, the White House issued an official response to a whitehouse.gov petition asking the Obama Administration to support GE labeling. The Administration has committed to replying within 30 days to all petitions receiving over 100,000 signatures. The response acknowledged Americans' growing interest in knowing where their food comes from, but focuses on measures for voluntary labeling of foods that do not contain GE ingredients, rather than the mandatory labeling of GE food the petition requests.

New food safety rules released, more coming

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has released one of two long-anticipated final food safety rules which will impact farmers. The final Preventive Controls Rule includes both good news and bad. In good news, several key definitions have been clarified to make sure that farms are not mistakenly classified as

“facilities” and subject to unnecessary and expensive regulation. However, direct-to-consumer sales platforms like roadside stands, farmers markets, and community-supported agriculture (CSA) operations are not explicitly exempt from being classified as retail food facilities, as the original Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) directed. Also, the rule requires potentially expensive third-party audits, which Congress explicitly forbade from being required in FSMA. While this rule is now final, forthcoming supporting documentation may clarify some of these issues. Tilth Producers urges the FDA to continue to make the rule align with FSMA during its implementation. The final Produce Safety Rule is expected in October.

**Save the date: Food & Farming Policy Briefing:
November 14, 2015, 3:30-5:00, Spokane, WA
(at Tilth Producers Conference)**

Join Tilth Producers for its annual briefing on emerging policy issues to address next season.

**Save the date: Good Food & Farming
Lobby Day: Feb 8, 2016, Olympia, WA**

Join Tilth Producers again in Olympia next year to support good food and farming policy.

Response from our readers

Dear Ms. Taylor-Stanley,

Your article in this month's Tilth Producers Quarterly honoring Rep. Dan Newhouse for joining the House Organic Caucus took us by surprise. We're completely shocked that Tilth would be congratulating Rep. Dan Newhouse since he is one of the driving forces of HR 1599 which effectively stops GMO labeling of our food. He is bought and sold by the industry and to have Tilth commend him for joining the House Organic Caucus is not only wrong, it sets a precedent for other industry hacks to find ways to hide their real motives by taking minor positions in our causes.

Sincerely,

Monte “Dosch” Koreis & Tory Shook, Temenos Highland Farm (Molson, WA)

Tilth Producers' reply:

Congressman Newhouse was one of 106 cosponsors of HR 1599, a bill which Tilth Producers strongly opposes. It is disappointing that Newhouse and the rest of Washington's Republican delegation are on the other side of this issue, and something that we will continue to address with all of them.

At the same time, the sustainable agriculture movement needs more conservative champions in Congress, which means sometimes we have to work with members who disagree with us on important issues. By joining the House Organic Caucus, Newhouse positioned himself to support organic and sustainable agriculture policy in the future. It's our job to keep pushing him in that direction. Thank you for engaging with us on this issue.

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