



*The Industry's Only  
Advocate in Washington for  
All Crop Insurance Sectors*

December 27, 2019

AACI Members,

It has been quite a constructive year following a very productive 2018 where a new, five-year farm bill was completed. We have seen a very engaged AACI begin to consistently update membership with fulsome weekly newsletters, quarterly reports and annual reviews. While legislative activity has trended down due to the completion of the farm bill, AACI has remained engaged and effective in the policy realm working to mold both another round of disaster aid and the Administration's Market Facilitation Program (MFP). We've also continued to engage policy makers on and off the Hill in policy briefings and political fundraisers. I wanted to share with you a quick update on activities throughout 2019, as well as highlighting a few specific areas we plan to focus on in 2020.

### **Congressional Engagement**

Following the successful completion of the 2018 Farm Bill, the main focus of AACI staff in 2019 shifted towards engagement with new Members and staff. On average, over the past 10 years roughly 20% of House Members vacate their office every cycle, which means every two-years there will be a new person handling agriculture issues in one out of every five offices. The Senate attrition rate is somewhat lower at 15% every two years. In addition, the party in power in both chambers has changed several times in recent years with the Senate shifting four times since 2001 and the House three times since 2007. With the makeup of Congress constantly changing, AACI staff and members must remain diligent in reaching out to the new offices. The outcome of the 2018 election resulted in 90 new Members in House of Representatives and nine new Members in the Senate, most of who have little background knowledge on production agriculture issues. Therefore, AACI staff immediately started visiting with new offices after Members we're sworn in to give staff an overview of both AACI and the federal crop insurance program. By the end of March, AACI staff had already conducted in-person meetings with over half of the new House offices and all nine of the new Senate offices, and by the August recess every new office had been visited or contacted at least once. As a result, AACI is now a top resource for a number of offices on the Hill when they have questions regarding crop insurance or agriculture in general.

In another effort to promote crop insurance on the Hill, this spring AACI staff reached out to Congressman Glenn Thompson (R-PA) and Congresswoman Cheri Bustos (D-IL) about launching a congressional caucus specifically to expand our ongoing outreach efforts to Members of Congress and their staffs. After working with both offices and other industry representatives, the Congressional Crop Insurance Caucus was officially launched on July 17, 2019 with Congressman Thompson and

Congresswoman Bustos as the caucus cochairs. Shortly after the launch, AACI staff assisted in hosting a standing room only kick-off briefing for the caucus on July 25, during which both Rep. Thompson and Rep. Bustos addressed the group and reiterated their strong support for crop insurance and the creation of the caucus. Following their remarks, a crop insurance expert provided attendees with an overview of the federal crop insurance program. Moving forward, the crop insurance industry plans to work with both offices to organize quarterly caucus briefings to help Members of Congress and their staff better understand the federal crop insurance program and remain apprised of current issues in the crop insurance industry during non-farm bill years. To date, there are 26 members of the caucus, including members from both parties and over 15 different states. AACI staff plans to continue to build support for the caucus on Capitol Hill for years to come.

Lastly, current AACI Chairman Mike Davenport was asked by Congress to testify at a hearing held by the House Agriculture Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management titled, "How Farm Policy Helps Farmers in Adverse Weather Conditions". The purpose of the hearing was to hear from industry representatives following the various disasters in 2018 and 2019 to get a sense of how farm programs did or did not work as intended. During the hearing, Committee Members questioned Chairman Davenport directly on a number of issues, including the incentives for planting cover crops, how to improve and expand coverage for specialty crops and timber, how crop insurance and federal disaster aid function together, the possibility of tailoring certain crop insurance dates/deadlines to specific areas, and how to increase overall participation in the federal crop insurance program. Mr. Davenport confidently answered all the questions and reassured Members of the Committee that, despite the unusually large number of acres that were impacted by the recent weather events, the crop insurance industry is prepared to assist all producers who reported a loss.

## **Expanded Communication & Political Reach**

AACI increased its member communication in 2019 beginning with the recognition of all AACI-PAC contributors in the annual report that was distributed in early 2019. The association also distributed lapel pins to PAC contributors based on the amount that they gave, and they plan to continue to do so moving forward. Throughout the year, AACI continued to send out the 'AACI Weekly Newsletter' every Friday morning to eligible members, which provides a summary of what took place that week in DC, specifically in the agriculture and trade worlds. 2019 AACI-PAC contributors of \$500 or more are also receiving Agripulse's Daybreak newsletter that goes out every weekday morning. In addition, for the first time AACI released quarterly reports to all AACI members highlighting the associations activities in the second and third quarters of 2019. Some of the activities listed in the reports include summaries of both the spring and fall fly-ins, highlights from Chairman Davenport's testimony in front of the House Agriculture Committee, and the launch of the Congressional Crop Insurance Caucus. AACI also released their second annual report highlighting all activities and accomplishments in 2019, which also goes out to all AACI members. Further, this fall AACI kicked-off their Member of Congress Connect Program to help introduce our AACI members to Representatives and Senators in their states/districts. The purpose of this program is to help foster relationships between AACI members and district staff around the nation that way, if a question comes up pertaining to crop insurance or production agriculture, the AACI member can be the go-to resource for that office. AACI plans to build the program in 2020 and for years to come.

In addition to our increased communication, AACI staff and members have worked to greatly expand the reach of AACI-PAC. AACI-PAC started off 2019 by hosting an event at our annual convention in San Diego, CA for Congressman Dan Kildee from Michigan's 5th District. In April, AACI-PAC co-

hosted a successful dinner for Senator Joni Ernst in Johnston, IA. Throughout the year AACI PAC has given to over 77 different campaigns for candidates running for the House of Representatives and the Senate, both republicans and Democrats. In total we have contributed \$143,500 in 2019 to date. Those numbers are significant as we continue to find and engage more campaigns who are supporters of the crop insurance industry's priorities. It also helps our efforts to educate members on the program. Our hope is that as we move into 2020 we can continue to grow up PAC steadily. With 2020 being an election year, it will be important that we have the funds necessary to support candidates who understand the importance of a viable risk management program for production agriculture.

### **“Seeding the Future” – AACI Leadership Program**

Beginning in 2020, AACI will launch its new leadership development program, “Seeding the Future”. The goal of this program is to give a new generation of crop insurance industry leaders the tools and resources needed to be effective representatives of AACI and the crop insurance industry both in Washington, DC and throughout the country. Over the past year, AACI staff worked with the association leadership to develop a curriculum for the program, which will encompass four courses over the initial two-year period followed by two other activities in the following year. Below are brief descriptions of the four courses:

- **History & Mission:** To understand the history and evolution of the federal crop insurance program and AACI.
- **Communications & Leadership:** To understand political messaging and how to communicate effectively with members of the press and policymakers.
- **PAC, Grassroots & Policy:** To understand how PACs work and how to organize events, to gain an understanding of how district offices function, and NCIS’s role as it relates to AACI and the industry as a whole.
- **Political & Policy:** To understand policy development and implementation through legislative and executive branch decision-makers, as well as other leaders of agriculture and conservation organizations.

Following completion of the four courses, leadership program participants will be required to complete two of the following activities with the assistance of AACI staff:

- Organize a grassroots meeting in the district for his or her Members of Congress.
- Organize an in-district PAC event.
- Draft a Letter-to-the-Editor for a local paper in support of crop insurance.
- Identify or approach at least one, new non-risk bearing members to join AACI.

Once an individual completes all the requirements of the “Seeding the Future” program, they will be recognized at the next AACI annual meeting that takes place every February.

### **May Fly-In**

On May 21-23 AACI hosted a roughly 30 association members in Washington, DC for their 2019 spring fly-in. During their visit the group met with both Members of Congress and their staff as well as Administration officials. Some of the most notable meetings included a discussion with RMA

Administrator Martin Barbre and his staff where they answered questions and gave the group an update on several RMA programs. RMA staff shared their contact information and has been working with individual members of AACI to resolve some of the issues that were raised during the discussion. AACI participants also had a panel discussion with past and present Chiefs of Staff, Chris Heggem from Rep. Gianforte's office (R-MT), Mark Williams from Rep. Conaway's office (R-TX), and Jen Daulby from Rep. Davis's office (R-IL). Panelists talked about what a day in the life of a member entails and the what working in a personal office is like. AACI members came away with a better idea of what goes on behind the scenes in the member's offices and how to continue to efficiently collaborate with them in the future.

In addition, the participants also took time to meet with nearly 50 Hill offices, both Republican and Democrat. With 2019 not being a farm bill year, AACI focused its lobbying efforts on bipartisan education and advocacy with freshman members as well as visited with Members located in congressional districts where AACI already has a strong footprint. AACI members met personally with several Members of Congress, including Agriculture Committee Members Congressman Salud Carbajal (D-CA), Congressman TJ Cox (D-CA), Congresswoman Angie Craig (D-MN), and Congressman Jim Baird (R-IN). Offices were selected to give attendees the opportunity to increase awareness of the AACI, highlight the importance of maintaining the current crop insurance program, and explain the benefits of crop insurance and how it works. AACI members hope to be a resource for crop insurance information for new and returning members of Congress and their staff well into the future.

## **October Fly-In**

On October 15-17, AACI hosted about 20 members in Washington, DC for their 2019 fall fly-in. While in town the attendees met with Members of Congress and their staff, Administration officials and commodity group representatives. First, the group participated in a roundtable discussion with representatives from the corn, cotton, peanut, sugarbeet, and conservation industries where they received an update on the current state of each industry and heard about some of the biggest challenges that growers have had to overcome in recent years. The group also met with the two Cochairs of the Congressional Crop Insurance Caucus, Congressman Glenn Thompson (R-PA) and Congresswoman Cheri Bustos (D-IL), to thank them for their efforts, and both Members explained how the caucus is needed now more than ever to keep Congress informed as to what's going on in the crop insurance sector during off farm bill years. The group presented Congressman Richard Hudson (R-NC) with his 'Champion of Crop Insurance' plaque, which he received for his dedication to protecting the federal crop insurance program. Lastly, the group met with the Minority Staff Director of the House Agriculture Committee Matt Schertz, who explained why it's so important for groups like AACI to routinely visit Capitol Hill pointing to the large number of new Members who have little knowledge of production agriculture.

In addition, AACI fly-in participants spent a day on the Hill making visits to over 50 different House offices. During these visits, AACI members met with both Republican and Democratic offices from over 25 different states, all of which have some stake in production agriculture. While in these offices, AACI members provided updates on the current status of the crop insurance industry, and also asked Members to consider becoming a member of the Congressional Crop Insurance Caucus that was announced this past July. AACI members explained the goal of the caucus, which is to serve as a platform to educate Congress and their staff on current crop insurance issues. As a result of the visit,

several Members immediately agreed to join the caucus and several others were highly considering it. In the end, AACI members were successful in achieving their main goal of expanding the association's footprint on Capitol Hill and building support for the federal crop insurance program.

## Moving Forward

As we look forward to 2020 there are three specific areas where we plan to focus our efforts, in addition to the ongoing [mission, values, and goals](#) laid out by the association.

1. **Crop Insurance Caucus Briefings:** AACI plans to work with the offices of Congressman Glenn Thompson (R-PA) and Congresswoman Cheri Bustos (D-IL) to develop and hold quarterly briefings for Members of Congress and their staff to educate them on the federal crop insurance program and keep them apprised of what's going on within the crop insurance industry.
2. **Political Engagement:** AACI plans to begin a 'Member of Congress Connect' program, where AACI staff will work to setup meetings between AACI members and Congressional district offices with the goal of fostering relationships outside of Washington, DC.
3. **Leadership:** AACI is finalizing it's first group of individuals to participate in AACI's new leadership development program, "Seeding the Future". In 2020 the inaugural class will begin their training, which will take place over the course of two years. Those who complete the required courses will then be recognized at AACI's annual meeting in 2023.

In closing, AACI has continued to make positive strides in expanding the scope and purpose of its mission and services and continues to build out lasting relationships on Capitol Hill, within the Administration, and among like-minded counterparts in-and-around the agriculture and conservation industries. These efforts have continued to increase our visibility and effectiveness in Washington, D.C. and I look forward to working with you throughout another productive year.

Optimistically,



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