



December 23, 2020

AACI Members,

After the COVID-19 pandemic required social distancing restrictions for most of the country, AACI began immediately exploring ways to keep its membership proactively engaged with Washington. As a result, we enjoyed another successful year of continued relationship and coalition building. Below is a summary of several efforts undertaken by AACI over the course of the past year to keep its members up to date, followed by a few specific areas we plan to focus on in 2021.

CONGRESSIONAL/POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

AACI Weekly Call Series (April 6-July 30)

In early April almost immediately following the pandemic-related travel issues, AACI launched its first-ever weekly call series for its entire membership, providing members an opportunity to engage with Members of Congress, administration officials, university professors, and other senior Capitol Hill staff on a weekly basis. During the calls, Members of Congress and their staff updated participants on congressional activity related to COVID-19, such as changes to SBA's Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), complications in the food supply chain and meat processing sector, and details of USDA's Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP).

On the Administrative side, AACI connected with RMA Administrator Martin Barbre and his staff, who walked through their agency updates since the start of 2020 and answered a series of crop insurance related questions from AACI members. Separately, USDA Chief Economist Dr. Robert Johansson provided members with an in-depth presentation on the current economic situation and the forecasts for U.S. crops, livestock, and trade.

Outside of the beltway, Dr. Bart Fisher, Co-Director of the Agricultural & Food Policy Center at Texas A&M University, provided an overview of various relief programs available for agriculture and an in-depth analysis of payment distribution under USDA's CFAP. In hosting these weekly calls, AACI staff hopes to continue to provide valuable insight to the policy landscape in Washington, D.C., and, at the same time, keep its members well-aware of what's happening across the country in the agriculture community at large.

Additional Virtual Calls/Videos

In addition to the weekly call series, AACI staff also worked to temporarily reshape its ongoing "Member of Congress Connect" program, where AACI staff assists in facilitating meetings and

relationships between AACI members and Congressional district offices with the goal of fostering relationships outside of Washington, D.C. During these video calls, small groups of AIP representatives and agents were able to interact on a more personal level and discuss issues that pertain directly to the participants' and Member's home state and/or district. Should any AACI member wish to participate or would benefit from assistance in facilitating a meeting with their local Member of Congress, please let the staff know and we'll work with you to have it set up. If any AACI member wishes to participate in future engagements or would benefit from facilitating a meeting with their local Member of Congress, please let the staff know and we'll work with you to have it set up.

VIRTUAL FALL MEETING

On September 30 and October 1, AACI held its fall meeting in a virtual setting where members had a chance to engage with current and former elected officials, RMA Administrator Barbre and his staff, congressional staff, and political expert David Wasserman of the Cook Political Report.

AACI President Scott Graves kicked off the meeting with an association update and answered several questions related to the AACI-PAC and the current environment in D.C. Following Scott's comments, he welcomed the first speaker of the meeting, former Senator Heidi Heitkamp (D-ND). Sen. Heitkamp used her time to touch on the challenges that agriculture is currently experiencing as well as to talk about the One Country Project, which is dedicated to reopening the dialogue with rural communities, rebuilding trust and respect, and advancing an opportunity agenda for rural Americans.

RMA Administrator Barbe and his staff were up next on the agenda and walked through the various updates that RMA has made because of COVID-19, including deferral of interest, changes to insurance and production reporting deadlines, self-certification on replant, and others. They also provided updates on changes to prevented planting, enterprise units, potential PRF changes, and other 2020 FCIC Board Actions. RMA then used the remainder of their time to answer various questions from AACI members.

The last speaker was Skylar Sowder, who serves as the agriculture staffer for Senator John Boozman. Skylar provided an update from the Senate perspective, such as what to expect with the CR and funding for CCC, as well as the status of more COVID relief. She also touched on what can be expected as we move into 2021, including how things could change if Democrats take control and what the prospects are for reopening the farm bill prior to 2023.

AACI Chairman Mike Davenport welcomed everyone and gave a brief overview of the schedule. Scott Graves then introduced Congressman Rick Crawford (R-AR), who provided a lay of the land from a Member's perspective. Rep. Crawford explained how Congress needs to look at ways to prevent the normalization of reliance on ad hoc disaster payments, and at the same time, look for ways to improve our current farm programs to be able to address the problems we've seen in recent years without additional relief. He also gave his thoughts on reopening the farm bill next year and noted that the one area that needs significant improvement is the stability and integrity of the food supply chain.

The last speaker of the day was David Wasserman, who is House Editor of the Cook Political Report and recognized as one of the nation's top election forecasters. Mr. Wasserman gave an in-depth update on the upcoming election, during which he touched on current polling for November, the difficulties of holding an election in this current climate, key House and Senate races, and his outlook for the Presidential election. In addition, Wasserman touched on several variables and how they could impact the outcome, such as the Supreme Court nomination, COVID response, mail-in ballots, and others.

ELECTION OUTCOME/IMPLICATIONS

Although we are still waiting on the results of a few outstanding races, including two Georgia Senate runoffs scheduled to take place on January 5 that will decide which party holds power in the upper chamber, we do know there will be some significant changes in Congress and the Administration as it relates to agriculture. First and foremost, it's certain that we have lost 3 of 4 Chairs and Ranking Members of the Agriculture Committees with Rep. Collin Peterson losing his reelection and both Senator Pat Roberts and Rep. Mike Conaway retiring at the end of the year. Collectively, these three members represent more than 80 years of public service and their absence will surely be felt. The only one remaining in Ag leadership will be Senator Debbie Stabenow, who is expected to keep her spot as the top Senate Democrat on the Committee. As for Chairman Roberts' position, Senator John Boozman (AR) will assume the role as the top Republican on the Committee.

Looking at the House side, Rep. GT Thompson (PA), a founder and current co-chair of the Crop Insurance Caucus, will take on the role as the Ranking Member of the House Agriculture Committee. On the Democratic side, Rep. David Scott (GA), will be the incoming Chairman, the first African American to lead the Committee.

Looking at USDA, President-Elect Biden named former Secretary Tom Vilsack of Iowa as his nominee for the top agriculture post. As everyone will recall, Vilsack served as USDA Secretary for all eight years of the Obama Administration. Biden and his transition team pointed to experience, familiarity, and the ability to largely avoid controversy as their rationale for putting Vilsack forward again.

It is somewhat typical to witness large amounts of turnover as it relates to the newer members of the committees, but this amount of turnover at the top is unusual and will require an increased amount of relationship building by elected and appointed members and representatives within the industry. In order to accomplish this, AACI staff plans to hit the ground running in early 2021 by setting up various calls and virtual meetings with new Members and their staff, specifically the ones who get elected to the Agriculture Committees, as well as others that represent large crop producing districts. AACI also plans to engage with new USDA/RMA employees soon after they are appointed and will incorporate AACI leadership into all of these discussions as necessary.

CONGRESSIONAL CROP INSURANCE CAUCUS

The second official event of the Congressional Crop Insurance Caucus was cancelled in March of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and since then, Congress' primary focus has been dealing with its response to the virus with an eye towards the then upcoming Election Day. However, as we look at the back at the various natural disasters that took place in 2020 (record number of hurricanes in the Southeast, the Midwest derecho, California wildfires, etc.), we believe there is an opportunity in the near future for the Caucus to educate both new and current Members on how the Federal crop insurance program assisted producers in these areas who were negatively impacted.

AACI recently held calls with the offices of both Caucus Co-Chairs (Rep. Bustos and Rep. Thompson) to discuss a plan for the Caucus moving forward given we expect pandemic-related logistics to be a continued issue in early 2021. AACI staff is also going to evaluate the current list of Caucus members

to identify those who will no longer be in Congress in 2021 and work to identify new Members that would likely benefit from joining the caucus, either based on the district they represent or their past/current professional work.

MOVING FORWARD

As we look forward to 2021 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. **Normalize Virtual Outreach:** After finding success with virtual events in 2020, AACI plans to continue providing virtual opportunities in 2021, which will give all association members a chance to participate in multiple AACI events on a more consistent and efficient basis. Our hope is to continue to increase overall member engagement by providing multiple opportunities for members to become directly involved with association and its activities.
2. **New Member/Staff Engagement:** The 2020 elections resulted in several new Members being elected to rural districts, as well as a change in three of the four Chairman and Ranking Member positions as well as within the Administration. AACI will spend the beginning of next year connecting with newly elected officials and their staff to make sure they are aware of AACI and help educate them on the importance of the crop insurance program. AACI will also continue to build off its “Member of Congress Connect” program, where AACI staff will work to facilitate meetings between AACI members and Congressional district offices with the goal of fostering lasting relationships outside of Washington, D.C.
3. **Leadership:** After the unforeseen global pandemic forced the postponement of AACI’s leadership program, AACI staff has decided to shift the inaugural course to a virtual format forgoing another year-long delay. The goal is to have the class complete two of the four courses (History & Mission and Political & Policy) in 2021. From there they will complete the remaining two courses (Communications & Leadership and PAC, Grassroots, & Policy) in-person in 2022.

In closing, AACI, despite several unforeseen hurdles, has continued to successfully make positive strides in expanding the scope and purpose of its mission and services and building out lasting relationships on Capitol Hill, within the Administration, and among like-minded counterparts in-and-around the agriculture and conservation communities. These efforts have expanded our visibility and effectiveness in Washington, D.C. and I look forward to building upon these efforts in 2021.

Optimistically,



Scott C. Graves
President,
American Association of Crop Insurers