



December 20, 2022

AACI Members,

It has again been a constructive year in planning as we prepare for the reauthorization of the Farm Bill in the 118th Congress. Leading up to the Farm Bill, AACI has worked with congressional leaders to establish the Crop Insurance Caucus to educate new members and their staffs on the vital role the program plays in production agriculture and risk management. While the initial rollout of the program has been somewhat hampered the past couple of years by the pandemic and security restrictions on Capitol Hill, next year we should (finally) be keyed up to fully utilize this organization for congressional outreach and education; and just in time.

We have continued to engage policymakers on and off the Hill in detailed briefings and at political fundraisers. We are also looking forward to hosting multiple unrestricted fly-ins this coming year as we'll have more than 200 members in the House alone that have never voted on a farm bill or related risk-management programs.

I want to share with you a quick recap on activities throughout 2022, followed by a few specific areas we plan to focus on in the upcoming year.

Association Activities

2022 NCIS/AACI Convention Summary

After a one-year hiatus, AACI members gathered in Indian Wells, CA for the 2022 Crop Insurance Industry Annual Convention hosted by AACI and the National Crop Insurance Services. The meeting kicked-off with comments from the leadership of both organizations. Each of them highlighted their accomplishments over the course of 2021 and laid out the steps they would take in 2022 to continue to build support for the program.

Attendees also heard from several Members of Congress, including video recordings from Senators Tina Smith (D-MN) and Jerry Moran (R-KS). Following that, both Rep. Salud Carbajal (D-CA) and Rep. Adrian Smith (R-NE) provided live video comments and participated in a brief Q&A session with the audience.

Several USDA officials also made appearances over the three-day meeting, including USDA Secretary Vilsack who gave brief prerecorded comments noting his support for the industry. The newly elected RMA Administrator Marcia Bunger joined in person, along with her staff, and gave updates on the work RMA is currently doing as well as the direction they planned to go over the course of this year. There was also a presentation from USDA Economist Seth Meyer.

The convention included an ag economic outlook from Dr. Joe Outlaw with Texas A&M University. Dr. Outlaw shared his insights on the future of the ag economy based on price fluctuations, input costs, and supply and demand for certain commodities across the globe. Finally, the Cook Political Report's David Wasserman gave an update on the current political landscape and his predictions for the 2022 Mid-Term Elections.

Congressional Engagement

Spring Fly-In

In May, AACI hosted its first full attendance fly-in since the start of the pandemic. Roughly 35 AACI members made the trip to Washington, DC where they met with administration officials, members of Congress, and staff over three days to discuss the federal crop insurance program.

The fly-in began by meeting with both the House Agriculture Committee majority and minority staff. Both sides provided an update from their boss's perspective and highlighted several priorities that they have for the next Farm Bill. Next, AACI held a virtual meeting with RMA Administrator Marcia Bunger who gave an update on the work her Agency is doing to address concerns in farm country. Bunger was also joined by several staff who answered questions from AACI members. Fly-in participants also had dinner with Rep. Adrian Smith (R-NE), who provided his outlook on the state of Congress and touched on the status of the United States' trade situation.

The second day of the fly-in was spent on Capitol Hill where association members visited over 40 congressional offices. AACI targeted meetings with offices where the member will likely have a key role during the Farm Bill debates. AACI members met with several high-profile members of the Senate and House Agriculture Committees, including Sen. John Hoeven (R-ND), Sen. Roger Marshall (R-KS), Sen. Joni Ernst (R-IA), Rep. Austin Scott (R-GA), Rep. Jim Baird (R-IN), Rep. Troy Balderson (R-OH), and others. In addition to the Hill visits, AACI also held three fundraising events. There was a breakfast for with Rep. Dan Kildee (D-MI), a lunch with Sen. Jerry Moran (R-KS), and finally the group attended a Washington Nationals game where they were joined by House Agriculture Committee member Rep. Rick Crawford (R-AR).

The final day started with a discussion with House Agriculture Committee member Rep. Abigail Spanberger (D-VA). Rep. Spanberger noted that she was not extremely familiar with crop insurance but expressed interest in learning more about the program and how it helps producers. Finally, the group headed over to the Senate where they met with both Republican and Democratic staffers on the Senate Agriculture Committee. Both groups gave updates on the status of their committee hearings and provided an outlook for the upcoming year heading into the Farm Bill debate.

House Ag Hearing on Crop Insurance

On July 20th, the House Agriculture Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management held a hearing to review the federal crop insurance program. Witnesses testifying at the hearing included AACI Board Member Bob Haney, a crop insurance agent, a private developer of crop insurance products, and two producers, one from Georgia and another from Illinois. Each of the witnesses provided testimony before fielding questions from committee members.

Throughout the hearing, the witnesses received questions and comments on a variety of topics. Most notably, when asked about cutting premium subsidies, essentially every witness said that would be detrimental to the program. Witnesses were also asked about program expansion for specialty crop and current policies, as well as their thoughts on the recent rounds of ad hoc disaster aid. The producers in the group said they appreciated the ad hoc assistance provided to them but noted how crop insurance is more reliable in terms of timing. Several witnesses also touched on the 508(h) process and explained how it's a great tool the industry can use to fill in the gaps that aren't being covered by current policies. You can find additional information and document from the hearing [here](#).

AACI Leadership Development Program—Seeding the Future

Communications & Leadership

At the tail end of the May fly-in, AACI staff conducted the third course for their inaugural leadership class Seeding the Future. The course, titled “Communications & Leadership”, was meant to develop an understanding of political messaging and how to effectively communicate with policy makers and members of the press. Class members heard from two congressional communications directors; one handles from the House Agriculture Committee and one from Rep. August Pfluger’s (R-TX) office. The class got to hear the day-to-day functions of Capitol Hill communications, as well as how these staffers effectively get their bosses’ message delivered to the appropriate audience.

The class also participated in two of their own fundraisers. One was a reception with Rep. Angie Craig (D-MN), who sits on the House Agriculture Committee, and the second was a breakfast with Rep. Steven Palazzo (R-MS), who serves on the House Appropriations Committee. The group also met with a staff assistant and legislative correspondent, who are responsible for the administrative duties in a personal office, such as answering phones, writing letters, and giving tours. The discussion gave the group a sense of why every position is so critical to a congressional office when staff and resources are limited.

The final meeting of the week was with a veteran communications professional, who provided some knowledge based on his past experiences. He explained the importance of coming to Washington to get your message out to Members of Congress and their DC staff. However, he also highlighted the importance of building relationships with state and district staffers because they can be critical in terms of getting to message to the member when he or she is back in their home state.

PAC, Grassroots & Policy

In October, the AACI leadership class traveled to Kansas City for their fourth and final course of the program, PAC Grassroots & Policy. The purpose of this course is to walk through AACI’s relationship with NCIS and the industry, as well as grasping how PACs work, how to organize local events, and how to gain an understanding of the functions of congressional district offices.

The group met with Rep. Jake LaTurner (R-KS), who gave an overview of his day-to-day activity when working in his state and district compared to DC. He also noted the difference in his district staff compared to his Capitol Hill staff and explained how staffers in the district must put a heavy emphasis on making personal connections with constituents. With it being an election year, Rep. LaTurner also touched on his campaign work and how it changes based on whether it’s an election year. The group had also met with two fundraising professionals who educated the group on coordinating and hosting successful fundraising events in DC and their local areas. They also highlighted the importance of supporting industry PACs and explained why they are one of the keyways industry representatives can get their foot in the door with a new or long serving member of Congress.

The following day, participants were invited to the NCIS office where they met with several key staff members. NCIS provided a brief history of the organization, and each staffer gave an overview of their role. They reviewed several key areas of focus for the organization and the leadership class followed up with several. Finally, the group had a meeting with RMA’s Kansas City staff who provided an update on several topics of interest, including hurricane relief and USDA’s Emergency Relief Program. They also touched on new initiatives related to organics and specialty crops. RMA staff also answered several questions specific to certain crops and regions that were represented at the table.

2023 Farm Bill

With the 2023 farm bill quickly approaching, AACI is already laying the groundwork to address our priorities. AACI staff held separate calls with each of our nine board members and identified common themes and concepts on which the association will focus during the Farm Bill debate. The findings from those calls were presented during our winter board call, and participants had an in-depth discussion on the proposed next steps. AACI will have several priorities ready to share with the larger membership at the annual convention in February 2023.

Moving Forward

1. **Farm Bill Preparation:** AACI is identifying priorities for the 2023 farm bill. Once those are agreed upon, AACI will work with association members to get those ideas in front of appropriate staffers and members of the House and Senate.
2. **New Member Education:** In the 118th Congress, over half of the House and nearly a quarter of the Senate will have never voted on a Farm Bill. Therefore, AACI and industry partners will need to put a major focus on member education. This will be done through association fly-ins, efforts from the Congressional Crop Insurance Caucus, and general outreach from AACI staff and representatives of commodity groups.
3. **2023 Fly-Ins:** Since a Farm Bill is set to be considered in 2023, AACI plans to hold two separate fly-ins. The first will take place sometime in May, and the second will take place in late October or early November. Both will be full fly-ins with meetings beginning on Tuesday and ending on Thursday of the selected weeks.
4. **New Leadership Development Class:** In 2023, AACI will launch the second official class of their leadership development program, Seeding the Future. AACI hopes to have between 8-15 participants with a good mix of company and agent representatives. Ideally, the class will complete two courses in 2023 and two in 2024, and they will be recognized for completion at the 2025 annual convention.

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

Optimistically,



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President,
American Association of Crop Insurers