



LEGISLATIVE *update*

June 2021

Information provided by Jordan Lamb, DeWitt LLP.

Joint Committee on Finance Acts on DATCP Budget – Support Strengthening State Meat Supply Chain

On June 2, the Joint Finance Committee approved an omnibus motion along a 12-4 party-line vote, which provides \$4.3 million in state and federal funds as a part of the DATCP budget. Provisions in the motion aim to strengthen the state meat processing supply chain, promote Wisconsin's agricultural industry through export support and other promotion programs, and provide additional grants for farmer mental health. Specifically, the motion provides \$400,000 for meat processor grants and \$613,100 for the meat inspection program, which includes four new inspector positions. The motion also provides \$1.2 million for agricultural promotions, including helping producers cultivate relationships with potential buyers and \$200,000 in one-time funds for farmer mental health grants to cover the costs of vouchers for services. WCA has urged the legislature to support the state meat supply chain and supports this budget funding.

Finance Committee Approves Additional Funding for UW Agricultural Specialists

On May 27, the Joint Finance Committee approved funding for certain programs at UW System. The Committee directed \$1,000,000 in each year of the biennium to be placed into the Joint Finance Committee supplemental appropriation for UW agricultural specialists. This means that UW-Madison Division of Extension will have to request release of the funds from the Committee if the budget is approved but the funding has been specifically designated to support agricultural specialist positions. WCA and other commodity groups support this provision and appreciate the legislature's attention to agricultural research.

Budget on Course to Be Reviewed by the Full Legislature by End of June

The Joint Finance Committee is moving at a pace to have the budget out of committee and to the legislature by the end of June. Generally, once the Joint Finance Committee has completed action on the budget it takes about one week for drafting of the substitute bill to be completed. Once the substitute bill is drafted, then the bill is ready for floor action in both houses. It has not yet been determined whether this budget will begin in the Senate or in the Assembly, but they are on pace to complete their work by end of the state's fiscal year on June 30.

DNR Continues Work on NR 151 Nitrate Rule Revision

The DNR continues to work toward a proposed amendment to Wisconsin Administrative Code s. NR 151 to create a targeted performance standard for the application of nitrates to agricultural land to control nitrate levels in groundwater. The Technical Advisory Committee has completed its work and the Department released a draft Economic Impact Analysis for public comments. The DNR also released a draft rule, but that rule has not yet been opened for public comment. The DNR has only accepted comments on the economic impact of the proposal to date. WCA filed written comments on the economic impacts of the proposal on April 9, 2021. Our comments essentially stated that the Department had grossly underestimated the number of farms that would be affected by the proposed changes to NR 151 and failed to recognize the increased costs that those farms could incur in beef inputs and land base if farmers were required to comply with the draft rule changes. The next step is for the DNR to take a rule package to the NRB and request authorization for public hearings.

Natural Resources Board Approves New Rulemaking to Adjust Wolf Quotas and Harvest Regulations

Wisconsin held a winter 2021 wolf hunt from Feb. 22-29, 2021, following the removal of the gray wolf from the federal Endangered Species List. WCA advocated for this early wolf hunt at both the legislative and Natural Resources Board level in January and February. The DNR has also formed a new Wolf Harvest Advisory Committee to advise the agency on wolf issues in advance of the November 2021. Several farmer members are serving on this committee. Finally, the DNR has started the process to revise their wolf harvest administrative rule to incorporate updated quota and other wolf management recommendations, which are expected to be forthcoming from the new Advisory Committee.

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