

## News from Washington: January 11-15

### **Biden COVID Package Calls for Extension of SNAP Increase, Back Hazard Pay for Essential Workers**

An extension of the 15% boost in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits and more money for the Women, Infants and Children program are included in the \$1.9 trillion stimulus package President-elect Joe Biden plans to propose to Congress.

Ahead of Biden's planned Thursday speech, his transition team released details of the relief package, which also includes support for legislation called the FEED Act to partner with restaurants in feeding the needy.

"As I speak, one in 7 households in America — more than 1 in 5 Black and Latino households — report they don't have enough food to eat," Biden said in a speech. "This includes 30 million adults and as many as 12 million children. It's wrong, it's tragic, it's unnecessary, it's unacceptable."

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### **Ag District Members Break GOP Ranks on Impeachment**

Lawmakers can now turn their eyes toward next Wednesday when Joe Biden will be inaugurated as president after Donald Trump was impeached by the House for a second time. The Senate won't take up the impeachment before Trump leaves office.

The ten Republicans who voted for impeachment included California's David Valadao, who represents one of the most important ag districts in the country and narrowly won election in November to the seat he lost in 2018.

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### **Ag Groups Rally Behind Choice of Regan as EPA Chief**

Ag groups are more than happy with the choice of Michael Regan, secretary of North Carolina's Department of Environmental Quality, to be the next administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, citing his experience working with the farming community in North Carolina and the Biden administration's extensive outreach to farm groups thus far.

"We are big fans of his," says Michael Formica, assistant vice president and general counsel at the National Pork Producers Council, which is circulating a letter among farm groups supporting Regan's upcoming nomination to be EPA chief. He says in North Carolina, Regan "really took it upon himself to actually go out and visit farms, meet with farmers, and figure out what was really going on" before moving ahead with regulations.

Regan, 44, has some farming in his background, sharing with a group of more than a dozen ag CEOs that his grandfather was a small farmer in Bladen County, North Carolina, "where he planted corn, tobacco, peanuts, and soybeans and also raised pork and poultry," according to a readout of a Jan. 5 meeting.

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### **Biotech Regs Up in the Air as Trump Departs**

A Trump administration spokesman confirms there are ongoing talks about a possible transfer of regulatory authority for genetically engineered food animals from FDA to USDA. “This is a deliberative process between HHS, FDA, USDA, and the White House and is still ongoing,” a spokesperson for the Department of Health and Human Services tells *Agri-Pulse*.

Politico [reported](#) earlier this week that FDA Commissioner Stephen Hahn refused to sign a memorandum of understanding turning over some animal biotech oversight to USDA. FDA is part of HHS.

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### **Congress Pushes EPA to Address Nutrient Pollution, Pesticides**

EPA’s spending bill approved last month continued to fund the agency at a level well above the Trump administration’s request, providing \$9.24 billion for fiscal 2021, just \$180 million above fiscal 2020 but 29% higher than the administration’s budget request.

But in addition to the money, Congress [provided direction](#) for the agency’s priorities in the coming fiscal year on a wide range of subjects, including nutrient pollution and pesticides.

For example, EPA was directed to brief House and Senate appropriators “on the potential impacts of pesticide use on regenerative agriculture and pollinators and other insects, wildlife, and water quality in the regenerative agriculture process.” Such directives are included in reports that accompany the legislation. Report language is intended to influence administration decisions without tying the agencies’ hands in law.

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### **USDA Tops Up CFAP for Hog Farms, Offers New Aid to Contract Producers**

The outgoing Trump administration is tapping unspent Agriculture Department funding to provide coronavirus relief to contract producers for the first time while providing supplemental payments to hog farms.

Under [a rule released Friday](#), USDA also is adjusting payments calculations for many specialty and row crop producers who have already received Coronavirus Food Assistance Program payments and is making turf grass and pullets eligible for CFAP.

The new aid could total as much as \$2.3 billion, using funds left over from the first and second rounds of CFAP.

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### **Cuba ‘Sponsor of Terrorism’ Designation Won’t Impact Ag Trade**

The State Department has taken one more swipe at Cuba in the final days of the Trump administration, officially declaring the communist country a “state sponsor of terrorism.”

The action may scare some potential investors away from doing new business with Cuban buyers, but it won’t have a direct impact on U.S. agricultural exports to the island nation, says Paul Johnson, president of the U.S. Agriculture Coalition for Cuba.

“It’s politically motivated and completely annoying,” Johnson said, but stressed that the determination will not block U.S. ag exports.

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### **Food, Ag Companies Pulling Back on Contributions**

Several major food and agribusiness companies have suspended their contributions to members of Congress in the wake of the Capitol riot and the GOP challenges to Biden’s election. Walmart, the world’s largest grocer, has specifically cut off support to Republicans who backed the election challenges.

Companies that have paused contributions to all lawmakers include Archer Daniels Midland, Cargill, CME Group, Tyson Foods, Smithfield Foods, Coca-Cola and Target, [according to the Wall Street Journal](#), which is tracking the corporate actions.

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### **USDA Working ‘Amicably’ with Biden Transition**

USDA officials tell *Agri-Pulse* they are working “amicably” with the Biden transition team, which is paving the way for the incoming administration next week. On the international front, the transition team has been pressing USDA for details on the impacts of the “phase one” trade deal with China.

President-elect Joe Biden will be facing a major decision on how to deal with the ongoing trade war with China. On the domestic side, the transition team is largely focused on farm bill issues.

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### **EPA Science Rule Challenged in Court**

Environmental groups are wasting no time challenging EPA’s rule on scientific transparency. A lawsuit filed in Montana claims that agency leadership pushed the rule through over the objections of the agency’s top scientists.

Last week, EPA “took the unusual step of making [the rule] effective immediately upon publication,” said the [complaint](#) filed by the Environmental Defense Fund, Montana Environmental Information Center and Citizens for Clean Energy.

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### **Stabenow presses worker protections**

The incoming chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, Debbie Stabenow, is pushing USDA to implement worker protection measures that were funded in the COVID aid package.

The legislation earmarked a minimum of \$1.5 billion for several needs, including worker protections, retooling assistance for farmers and processors, and purchases of food for distribution to the need. USDA subsequently announced a new round of funding for the Farmers to Families Food Box program, but the other provisions are likely to take a while to implement. President Donald Trump signed the bill into law on Dec. 28.

[Read more from Agri-Pulse.](#)

## **Livestock, Immigration Policy Among the Hot Topics at Farm Bureau Delegate Session**

Members of the American Farm Bureau Federation gathered virtually Thursday to assess the changes the organization would pursue in its lengthy policy book.

Among some of the most contentious topics were the addressing of price discovery in the beef cattle market and the treatment and compensation of agricultural workers. But, as is typically the case for a general farm organization, everything from dairy policy to weed resistance was on the agenda in the five hour and 40 minute virtual meeting.

Farm Bureau delegates approved new policy and called for an in-house study on the issue of price discovery in the beef cattle market. The new policy supports increasing “the share of negotiated sales in fed cattle markets with providing price transparency being the central focus.” Delegates from Iowa also pushed a recommendation to study the “regional mandatory minimum cash trade in the cattle markets and what levels would be appropriate to achieve robust price discovery.”

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