

Summer Reading for Agricultural Update

1. The first recommendation is the administration's perspective on the key agricultural policy issues that need to be addressed in 2013 as reported in *Challenges and Opportunities in U.S. Agriculture* (Chapter 8 of the *Economic Report of the President- 2013*). Although the content of this 28-page report goes beyond the specific topics in the Update Scope, the Committee considers it an excellent introductory document offering background on such topics as the role of agriculture in the U.S. economy, structural changes that have taken place since the 1920s, the development of new markets (e.g., organic, local), the contribution of research and development to productivity growth, agriculture in world trade, and the challenges of agricultural risk management. The document can be downloaded in PDF <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/granule/ERP-2013/ERP-2013-chapter8/content-detail.html>>

2. The second document is a Union of Concerned Scientists policy brief entitled *The Healthy Farm: A Vision for U.S. Agriculture* http://www.ucsusa.org/assets/documents/food_and_agriculture/The-Healthy-Farm-A-Vision-for-US-Agriculture.pdf.

This is an 8-page position statement by the UCS and is, therefore, not entirely neutral. We selected it because it looks at farming from a variety of perspectives (production, economics, and environment) and a variety of farming systems (industrial, conventional, organic, etc.), offering examples of technologies and management practices able to contribute to the UCS vision of a healthy farm.

3. The third document is a short article from *Scientific America* entitled "*Will Organic Fail to Feed the World?*" <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=organic-farming-yields-and-feeding-the-world-under-climate-change&page=2>.

The article presents a summary of a recent analysis of 66 studies comparing conventional and organic methods for 34 different crop species. There are numerous live links providing definitions of terms and additional reading.

Websites

1. *Know Your Farmer* is a site supported by USDA in their effort to inform the public about local food systems (what they are, how they can be promoted, resources available to consumers and farmers, etc.). A good place to enter this website is the "tools and resources" page, from where you

can navigate to other parts of the website:

http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=KYF_RESOURCES

2. The National Sustainable Agriculture Council supports the promotion of “sustainable” agriculture as defined by U.S. Code Title 7, Section 3103. Although the materials on their website do support their mission, we find that their articles are well documented and do a good job of following Farm Bill legislative efforts that would help or hinder the sustainable agriculture movement. We suggest that you enter their website via the page that defines sustainable agriculture and then navigate to other topics of interest. <http://sustainableagriculture.net/about-us/what-is-sustainable-ag/>

3. The “Food Dialogues” website is a creation of the U.S. Farmers and Ranchers Alliance and brings together thought leaders and practitioners from all points of view for moderated, civil webinar discussions. It could be characterized as presenting the “farmer/rancher” point of view; but in moving around the site it becomes clear that there is no “single” farmer/rancher point of view. This is the most difficult of the websites to navigate and caution must be taken to select a variety of webinars and views to get a balanced picture on issues covered. Starting at the home page of this website gives you an opportunity to link to some of the recent topics discussed on their Facebook page: <http://www.fooddialogues.com/> From the home page you can also click on the “learn about agriculture/food sources” tab which brings you to links addressing a number of issues that will be covered by the Update.

Comment

Farm Bill Monitoring and Individual Participation:

While the Agriculture Update Committee works on material for study and consensus, the next five year Farm Bill is under discussion in Congress, with important ramifications for food and farming in the years ahead. League members are encouraged to follow this discussion and participate as individuals. A good starting point would be this short AP explanation of Farm Bill issues: [Q & A: What is the Farm Bill?](#)

To follow House and Senate discussions of Farm Bill amendments and provisions:

- House Ag Committee Farm Bill page: <http://agriculture.house.gov/markup/consider-2013-farm-bill>; the link entitled FARRM Summary is a good place to start.
- Senate Ag Committee Farm Bill page: <http://www.ag.senate.gov/issues/farm-bill>; the summary is the first link listed.
- The Library of Congress (Thomas) tracking of the House Bill being debated on the floor is found [here](#).

- The Library of Congress (Thomas) tracking of the Senate Bill being debated on the floor is found [here](#).

The [current League position](#) expresses strong support for “sustainable, regenerative agriculture.”

For a sustainable agriculture view of issues, consider following the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition website: <http://sustainableagriculture.net/our-work/fbcampaign/>

The National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) provides a collective view of the Farm Bill activity and links to individual state-level departments of agriculture that cover a variety of state and national issues: <http://www.nasda.org/9887.aspx>

The Farm Bill Primer is supportive of the Farm Bill overall, but is run by two individuals who do a good job of listing the links to the House and Senate bills, amendments from Committee and on the floor, and the status of each amendment: <http://farmbillprimer.org/>

Sugar subsidy

Not a safety net but a

hammock <http://epilot.hamptonroads.com/Olive/ODE/VirginianPilot/LandingPage/LandingPage.aspx?href=VmlyZ2luaWFuUGlsb3QvMjAxMy8wNi8wOQ..&pageno=MjE.&entity=QXlwMjEwMg..&view=ZW50aXR5> "The Senate recently voted 54-45 against even mild reforms of the baroque architecture of protections for producers of sugar cane and sugar beets. The government guarantees up to 85 percent of the U.S. sugar market for U.S.-produced sugar. Minimum prices are guaranteed for sugar from cane and beets."