2019 Calendar of Events

Feb. –Mar.
February 12
Mar. 1-2
Mississippi Rice Winter Meeting, Cleveland, MS
MidSouth Farm and Gin Show, Cook Convention Center, Memphis, TN

ARKANSAS RICE ANNUAL MEETING

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In keeping with the meeting's theme of "Family Farming," USA Rice President & CEO Betsy Ward talked about the USA Rice mission of being the family's "out of town" voice, fighting in Washington for sound policies, and advocating for U.S.-grown rice in markets here and around the world.  "I appreciate the opportunity to share with folks in Arkansas what we are doing on their behalf and to hear firsthand their concerns and priorities," said Ward.  "It was also nice to be able to share some good news -- bipartisan passage of the Farm Bill."

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SECOND ADVANCE MAILED

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MANAGER’S MESSAGE

During the week of February 4th, USA Rice will hold its annual Government Affairs Conference (GAC) in Washington, D.C. The conference is a great opportunity to discuss important rice issues with members of Congress, USDA and Administration officials. The current partial budget shutdown, if not resolved before the Conference, will complicate and reduce the productivity of this year’s trip in Washington, D.C. The conference is a great opportunity to discuss important issues with members of Congress and the Administration for the passage and signing of the new 2018 Farm Bill. In this Manager’s Message, I will share with you some of the other important issues and official positions USA Rice will share with members of Congress and the Administration.

Farm Bill:

- Thank you for supporting the U.S. rice industry by passing the 2018 Farm Bill. The new farm bill includes improvements to the farm safety net and solidifies Congress’ commitment to the rice industry for another five years. This is truly significant as it has kept rice farmers in business despite a 46 percent drop (from $123.8 billion in 2013 to $66.3 billion projected for 2018) in net farm income over the past five years. Congress should work to ensure that USDA follows the legislation’s intent when drafting implementing regulations.
- Price Loss Coverage (PLC) is working. PLC, the primary risk management tool for rice farmers, is simple, predictable, and functions as intended by providing assistance in times of multi-year price declines.
- Relief from burdensome and costly regulations to family farms. We fully support the expansion of the family definition in regards to “Actively Engaged in Farming” rules to include first cousins, nephews, and nieces.
- The 2018 Farm Bill acknowledges the importance of rice production to the conservation of wildlife habitat and water quality by reauthorizing voluntary, incentive-based and cost share conservation programs.
- Increased mandatory funding for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). USA Rice is hopeful to continue to utilize this program through our Rice Stewardship Partnership with Ducks Unlimited. Under current RCPP awards, over 770,000 acres of rice and rice-rotation lands will be positively impacted, and $80 million in financial assistance towards habitat-focused conservation practices on working rice lands.
- Creation of the Agricultural Trade Promotion and Facilitation Program. This “umbrella” program guarantees annual mandatory funding for the Market Access Program (MAP) and Foreign Market Development (FMD) Program, among other programs, which USA Rice utilizes to successfully carryout promotional activities to maintain and develop international markets for U.S. rice.
- General maintenance of in-kind U.S. rice donations through international food aid programs. While food aid only constitutes about 3% of U.S. rice exports, it’s an important part of what we do and with the introduction of fortified U.S. rice into food aid programs. We expect additional sales of U.S. rice in the future under these important programs.
- We encourage USDA and USAID to prioritize milled and fortified milled rice when they are programming commodity shipments. These products are proven to be healthy and nutritious options for food aid programs.

Trade Issues: Trade is vital to the economic health of the U.S. rice industry. Over 50 percent of the rice grown in the U.S. is exported each year. USA Rice supports multilateral and bilateral trade agreements that provide commercially meaningful and significant improvements in market access for U.S. rice while maintaining the appropriate safety net for U.S. producers.

- Any disruption in trade has a major impact on the profitability and viability of U.S. rice farmers and the industry infrastructure that supports farming, milling, and exporting.
- U.S. rice farmers have invested millions of state check-off dollars and USDA/Federal Agricultural Service funds prying open new markets for rice and promoting the high quality, reliability, and strong food safety record of the industry.
- The rice industry has worked with the U.S. government for many years on eliminating trade barriers in markets where opportunity would exist for additional exports if free and fair trade were present in those markets.

Specifically, USA Rice:

- Encourages the quickest possible completion of the United States, Mexico and Canada Agreement (USMCA) to preserve the best trade deal ever negotiated for U.S. rice. USMCA represents 30 percent of U.S. rice exports with Mexico being the largest market and Canada our fifth largest.
- Continues to be cautiously optimistic about trade opportunities in China. The Government of China’s indication that rice will finally be imported is encouraging, as it is the approval of a small number of U.S. rice mills to ship to that market. We are working closely with USTR and USDA to ensure that the full list of approved mills is accepted by China.
- Continues working to open up the European Union market where high and discriminatory tariffs have kept out U.S. long-grain milled rice.
- Supports the recent agreement between the U.S. and Japan to start bilateral trade negotiations and commends the President for bringing Japan to the table.
- Encourages the Administration to be aggressive in pressing countries to live up to their WTO obligations and pursue enforcement actions within the WTO. China, India, Turkey, and Vietnam are exceeding their WTO commitments on rice subsidies.
- Urges the administration to consider the impact on U.S. rice from the tariffs and diversification of supply resulting from trade uncertainty.

Rice Standard of Identity: USA Rice supports the development of an FDA Standard of Identity for rice to prevent products from using the word rice to describe non-rice foods. We have spent a lot of time and effort educating consumers about the nutritional content of rice and the ways it can fit into their diet. It is misleading for consumers to then see “rice” on a product that does not have comparable nutrients to rice. The existing CODEX definition for rice should be used as a basis for developing a standard of identity. Rice is whole or broken kernels obtained from the plant species Oryza sativa L. and the four species of grasses from the genus Zizania that are called wild rice.

As you can see, there are still a lot of important issues that will be debated in Washington, D.C. that could potentially affect U.S. rice farmers. We are very fortunate to have USA Rice in D.C. to monitor these developments on a daily basis and fight on behalf of U.S. rice farmers and the industry as a whole.

Sincerely,

Keith Glover