



Top Stories

3/16/2016—The Department of Interior (DOI) [announced](#) its proposed 5-year offshore oil and gas leasing plan for 2017-2022. Notably, the plan excludes offshore drilling in the mid and south Atlantic Ocean, following objections from the Pentagon as well as from environmental groups in those states. The offshore plan does include 13 potential lease sales, including 10 in the Gulf of Mexico and three off the coast of Alaska.

3/15/2016—The U.S. Senate failed to garner the 60 votes necessary to pass [S. 2609](#), a bill that would have created a federal voluntary GMO labeling system, barring states from requiring their own labels. The measure failed 49-48. A similar bill in the House, [H.R. 1599](#), passed last summer 275-150. After the measure failed in the Senate, a number of major food companies including General Mills, Mars, Inc., ConAgra Foods and Kellogg's, all [announced](#) they will label all their products that contain GMOs to comply with Vermont's state GMO labeling law.



Food Safety Modernization Act. Specifically, these funds can be used to support implementation of the Produce Safety rule which establishes enforceable safety standards for the production and harvesting of produce on farms. Implementation of the rule is dependent on partnerships between FDA and the states, both to deliver education and technical assistance and to provide on-going inspection, compliance, and oversight.

3/18/2016—The U.S. Forest Service [announced](#) a total of \$272 million in Fiscal Year 2015 for the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) payments that will be distributed to 41 states and Puerto Rico. The SRS program provides funding to states with a large

portion of their land under federal control.

3/17/2016—DOI's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) [released](#) proposed updates to air quality regulations for offshore oil and gas operators. The proposal would update the standards for measuring

emissions and would make BOEM's air quality regulations consistent with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) air pollution regulations.

3/17/2016—The Obama Administration [announced](#) the availability of \$65.8 million in funding opportunities to support economic development in coal-reliant communities. These communities have seen negative economic impacts in the past few years as coal use has declined. Any community that has coal-related manufacturing or operations can apply for the funds.

From the Administration

3/22/2016—The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) [reported](#) that U.S. honey production was down 12 percent in 2015. The decline represents a 3 percent decrease in managed bee colonies and a 10 percent drop in the average yield per colony.

3/18/2016—The U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA) [provided](#) \$19 million to help states in the implementation of the

3/16/2016—BOEM [announced](#) it will designate a Wind Energy Area off the coast of New York, totaling approximately 81,130 acres, for potential commercial wind energy development. To date, BOEM has issued 11 commercial wind energy leases off the Atlantic coast.

3/14/2016—USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack [announced](#) the availability of up to \$260 million as part of Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). The RCPP aims to improve the nation's water quality, combat drought, enhance soil health, support wildlife habitat and protect agricultural viability and was created by the 2014 Farm Bill. Partnerships include private companies, local and tribal governments, universities, non-profits and other non-government partners who will work with farmers, ranchers and forest landowners on the landscape- and watershed-scale conservation solutions that work best for their region.

3/10/2016—President Obama and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau jointly [committed](#) to new actions to reduce methane pollution from existing oil and gas sources, during the Prime Minister's state visit to the U.S. The EPA will begin the process of developing new regulations by first requiring oil and gas companies to provide information to assist in how to reduce methane.

3/9/2016—The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) [announced](#) dates and locations for the public meetings to gather stakeholder input on the second installment of the Quadrennial Energy Review. The second installment will focus on the electricity system from generation to end-use. DOE will be holding six public meetings throughout the country from March until May.

2/29/2016—USDA [officially](#) amended the Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) regulations by removing the requirements for muscle cuts of beef and pork, and ground beef and pork. The change was required based on language included in the FY 2016 omnibus legislation passed in December 2015. COOL is a labeling law that for marketing purposes, requires retailers to provide their customers with information regarding the country of origin of regulated commodities. COOL regulatory

requirements for chicken, lamb, goat, farm-raised and wild caught fish and shellfish, perishable agricultural commodities, peanuts, pecans, macadamia nuts, and ginseng are still in effect.

From Congress

3/15/2016—The U.S. House of Representatives [passed](#) H.R. 3797, a bill that would loosen the requirements of the EPA's Cross State Air Pollution Rule and Mercury and Air Toxics Standards for power plants that convert coal refuse into energy. The White House released a Statement of Administrative Policy strongly opposing the measure.

Additional Resources and Reports of Interest

3/1/2016—The Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a [report](#) on pollinator health recommending, among other things, that USDA coordinate with other agencies to develop a plan to monitor wild, native bees, and evaluate gaps in staff expertise in conservation practices, and that EPA identify the most common mixtures of pesticides used on crops. GAO also noted that USDA could do more to ensure effective monitoring of wild and native bee populations and tracking the restoration of pollinator-friendly habitats.

NCSL Resources

The NRI Committee is pleased to present its [2016 Spring Webinar Series](#) with topics ranging from rural broadband to water infrastructure to GMO labeling. Webinars will be occurring every other Thursday from April 14-June 23. Check our [website](#) for more information and to register.