



## Top Stories

**7/7/16** – The U.S. Senate approved [S. 764](#) by a vote of 63-30. It would require mandatory labeling of certain bioengineered products while also pre-empting any existing or future state labeling requirements. The bill tasks the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) with developing, within two years of the bill's enactment, the formal rule for mandatory labeling that would include what type of products would need to comply. The bill will now move to the House. It remains unclear if and how it will take up the Senate bill, or look to go to conference to reconcile S.764 and the House's [Safe and Accurate Food Labelling Act of 2015](#).



**6/06/16** – USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) will provide an estimated \$300 million in cost-share assistance payments to cotton producers through the new [Cotton Ginning Cost-Share](#) program, which aims to expand and maintain the domestic marketing of cotton. The program will provide 60 percent more assistance per farm and per producer than in 2014.

**5/27/16** – The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) [finalized](#) the last remaining, new food safety rule under the landmark Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), which aims to improve public health by mandating companies in the U.S. and abroad take steps to prevent intentional adulteration of the food supply.

**5/09/16** – U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and the U.S. Department of State (DOS) [announced](#) that the H2-A visa application process that is frequently used to temporarily bring migrant workers to the U.S., is being

streamlined. Among the changes launched is a new e-Approval process that allows USCIS to send approval information for H2-A applications to DOS by close of the next business day, reducing costly delays to both the farmer and the migrant worker.

## From Congress

**5/19/16** – The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee approved [S.2795](#), which would establish a new framework for regulating advanced nuclear power plants. The bill would create

a new licensing process for plants that utilize advanced technology or produce less waste, and would provide more government funding to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

## From the Administration

**6/30/16** – The Department of Interior (DOI) [issued](#) final rules on fossil fuel royalties, eliminating the practice of selling coal, oil and gas extracted from public and tribal leases, on and offshore, at a discount to affiliated firms that then resell at market prices. The rule will go into effect on Jan. 1, 2017.

**6/23/16** – USDA [announced](#) new flexibilities for farms as part of the federal crop insurance program. The changes allow farmers to modify coverage as needed, to accommodate growing two crops on a single field in the same year. Additional revisions will also provide more flexibility to farmers to add land to their operations.

**6/23/16** – USDA [signed](#) a memorandum of understanding with two major national honey bee organizations to facilitate a continuing partnership and ensure USDA’s conservation efforts are as advantageous as possible to pollinators.

**6/13/2016** – The Department of Energy (DOE) [published](#) energy conservation standards for battery chargers for products including cell phones and digital cameras, which will represent 11.2 percent in energy use savings, and is expected to save consumers between \$600 million and \$1.2 billion over the next 30 years.

**6/13/16** – DOE [published](#) new standards for dehumidifiers that are projected to cut 18.6 million metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> and 11 thousand tons of SO<sub>2</sub> over the next 30 years. The rule is expected to save consumers between \$1.28 billion and \$2.71 billion over the same time period.

**6/10/16** – U.S. coal production [dropped](#) to its lowest level in 35 years in the first quarter of 2016, according to the Energy Information Administration (EIA). A mild winter and increasing demand for natural gas caused production levels to dip to the lowest quarterly level since 1981. EIA [predicts](#) 2016 will be the first year natural gas electricity surpasses coal.

**6/02/16** – The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) [released](#) a new assessment that shows atrazine, a widely used cornfield herbicide, is potentially harmful to bobwhite quails and mallard ducks while it is nontoxic to adult bees.

**6/02/16** – DOI [proposed](#) to lease more than 81,000 acres off the New York Coast for one of the nation’s first offshore wind farms. The project could generate over 700 megawatts of energy and power 245,000 homes.

**5/17/16** – DOE [announced](#) the addition of five military bases to the [Solar Ready](#) Vets program, which aims to connect veterans to careers in the solar industry when they leave duty. The Department also awarded \$10 million to 10 new projects through the Solar Training and Education for Professionals (STEP) program to help train skilled workers to meet the growing solar industry’s demand.

**05/17/16** – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack [said](#) he fears the “very serious situation” California faces this upcoming wildfire season. He noted that more than 40 million dead trees and the current drought have contributed to a high risk of wildfires this season. As a result, the Forest Service has transferred \$30 million to treating high-risk areas this upcoming season. Last year DOI spent nearly \$2.6 billion on firefighting.

**5/17/16** – In its 2016 annual energy projections, EIA [predicted](#) that greenhouse gas emissions will fall below the 2005 level by 2022 with or without the implementation of Clean Power Plan (CPP). However, CPP would [increase](#) the pace of reductions, decreasing emissions to 28 percent lower than 2005 by 2022 and 35 percent lower from 2030-2040. These reductions would occur primarily from switching from coal to natural gas and introducing more renewable solar and wind energy.

**05/13/16** – USDA [commissioned](#) its first survey of commercial beekeepers and its findings noted a loss of 113,930 bee colonies in 2016 due to symptoms of colony collapse disorder, compared with 92,250 the previous year.

**05/12/16** – USDA [finalized](#) a rule that implements various changes to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), in accordance with the 2014 farm bill.

**05/12/16** – Agriculture Secretary Vilsack [released](#) a roadmap for USDA’s Building Blocks for Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry, outlining progress, implementation plans and case studies.

**05/10/16** – FDA [signed](#) an agreement with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and the Department of Health Canada recognizing each other’s food safety systems as comparable to each other. It was the second time the FDA has recognized a foreign good safety system as comparable.

**05/05/16** – Vilsack [announced](#) the enrollment of more than 800,000 acres in the Conservation Reserve Program to help farmers offset the costs of restoring, enhancing and protecting certain vegetation that improves water quality, prevents soil erosion and strengthens wildlife habitat.

**05/05/16** – USDA and the EPA [announced](#) that five states – Colorado, Delaware, Iowa, Tennessee and Washington –are participating in the Cool & Connected program. It is a new initiative to help people use broadband service for downtown revitalization and economic development.

**05/04/16** - USDA [announced](#) \$15.6 million in grants to increase prosperity in rural America through research, education and extension programs focused on promoting community development, economic growth and environmental sustainability.

**05/04/16** – USDA [said](#) poor coordination between the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Farm Service Agency resulted in numerous farmers not being subject to random conservation compliance checks over the course of 2012-2015.

## Additional News

**6/27/16** – A Northern District of California Judge has [ordered](#) the USDA to drop its [guidance](#) on synthetic pesticides in organic compost after finding it violated the law by not making the document available for public comment in 2010. USDA now has until Aug. 22 to issue new guidance and gather comments.

**6/15/16** – U.S. farmers are expected to [harvest](#) a record, 51,115 acres of hops in 2016. This is an increase of 17 percent from 2015, which has craft brewers smiling and breathing sighs of relief.

**5/17/16** – A recent study by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine has [found](#) that new technologies in genetic engineering and conventional breeding are becoming less clear. In addition, the study found that there was no substantiated evidence of a difference in risks to human health between genetically engineered crops and conventionally bred crops.

**5/9/16** – Energy related carbon dioxide levels in the U.S. [fell](#) in 2015, down 12 percent since 2005. After increasing in 2013 and 2014, emissions decreased in 2015 mostly due to increased use of natural gas in the electric power sector. Since

2005, energy and emissions have declined overall, even while the economy has expanded.

## NCSL Resources

Registration is open for [NCSL's 2016 Legislative Summit](#) taking place in Chicago, Aug. 8-11.