Top Stories

5/23/19 – U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will provide $16 billion in aid to farmers in response to the ongoing trade war with China. The department will provide $14.5 billion directly to producers of a number of commodities based on varying degree of factors for each individual commodity. Overall, the direct payment portion of the aid package has a different and more complex design than USDA's first iteration of its trade aid package in 2018. The payments will vary from county to county, depending on what commodities were planted in the area this year, historical production average and the estimated trade damage. The department will also spend $1.4 billion through its Food Purchase and Distribution Program to help support those commodities impacted. Finally, the department will spend an additional $100 million through the Agricultural Trade Promotion Program to assist in developing new export markets.

5/20/19 – The United States, Mexico, and Canada agreed to lift both U.S. steel and aluminum and the corresponding retaliatory tariffs. Mexican and Canadian retaliatory tariffs were primarily aimed at agricultural goods including yogurt, whiskey and cucumbers.

5/17/19 - The United States and Japan reached an agreement that Japan would lift its restrictions on American beef imports, for the first time since 2003," Perdue said in a statement. In 2003, Japan banned U.S. beef and beef products following the detection of mad cow disease in the United States.

5/16/19 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) plans to enhance its surveillance program of African swine fever that has decimated hog herds across Asia by testing sick or dead animals on U.S. farms and at slaughter. The department will work with state and federal officials to identify and investigate illnesses among wild hogs to determine whether they should be tested for African swine fever or other foreign diseases.

5/8/19 – The House Appropriations Committee subcommittees have approved 10 of the 12 FY 2020 funding bills, with four appropriations bills affecting areas covered by the NRI Committee. Specifically, the Agriculture-FDA bill would receive $24.3 billion, a $1.3 billion or 6% increase over current levels ($23 billion), the Energy-Water appropriations measure would receive $46.4 billion, a $1.8 billion or 4% increase over current levels ($44.6 billion), the Interior-Environment bill was allocated $37.3 billion, a $1.7 billion or 5% increase over current levels ($35.6 billion), and the Transportation-HUD bill received $75.8 billion, a $4.7 billion or 7% increase over current levels ($71.1 billion).
5/3/19 – USDA released a list of three locations that are finalists—plus two runners-up—in the department's effort to move the Economic Research Service and National Institute of Food and Agriculture out of the Washington, D.C., area. Overall, more than 130 locations expressed interest in housing the agencies but the announcement narrowed down the list of finalists to the greater Kansas City area, North Carolina's Research Triangle Park, and multiple locations in Indiana proposed by Purdue University. St. Louis and Madison, Wis., "remain under consideration as alternative locations should the top three locations not suit USDA's needs."

5/2/19 – The House passed H.R. 9, 231-190, largely on party lines, which would, if enacted into law, forbid the United States from withdrawing from the Paris climate agreement as well as require the administration to come up with a plan to meet U.S. greenhouse gas emissions targets within 120 days. While the bill has little chance of being enacted, it represents Congress's first major stand-alone climate bill in almost 10 years. After the bill's passage, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) moved to put the bill on the Senate floor calendar, a maneuver that bypasses committee consideration.

5/2/19 – DOI's Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) published a final rule revising the agency's 2016 Blowout Preventer Systems and Well Control Rule, which was put into place in response to the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Under the new rule, BSEE no longer must approve the contractors that oil and gas companies pick to evaluate their well equipment. The list of equipment that must be on hand at rigs would become nonbinding. And real-time monitoring requirements, including onshore storage of well data available to BSEE upon request, would be replaced with "company-specific approaches."

5/2/19 – DOE reported that a cyber-attack, in the form of a distributed denial of service (DDoS) attack, was undertaken against a western utility company that provides electricity to parts of California, Utah and Wyoming on March 5 causing "interruptions of electrical system operations." They indicated that "the incident did not impact generation, the reliability of the grid or cause any customer outages."

4/29/19 – DOE Assistant Secretary Bruce Walker publicly stated that the administration is not working on any plans to subsidize coal, though it is working to improve the grid's ability to withstand cyber or physical threats. "Nobody I know is looking at subsidizing coal, period," he told reporters at a National Rural American Electric Cooperative Association Legislative Conference.

4/25/19 – The Bureau of Land Management released a draft environmental impact statement concerning the potential impacts of hydraulic fracturing on more than one million acres in California. The action, if finalized, would end a five-year moratorium on leasing federal land in California to oil and gas developers. In 2013 a federal judge ruled that the government had violated the National Environmental Policy Act when it issued oil leases in Monterey County without analyzing the environmental dangers of fracturing.

4/25/19 – The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that incidences of foodborne illness jumped by nearly 400% in 2018 compared with the previous three years. Two likely reasons behind the large increase include new diagnostic methods, allowing the cause of a person's illness to be identified much more quickly as well as that infections are truly increasing. Nearly half of the illnesses were linked to produce while meat and poultry were responsible for the second-most illnesses, followed by dairy and eggs, then fish and shellfish.

**From Congress**

5/22/19 – Senator Susan Collins (R-Maine) introduced a bipartisan bill that would allocate $300 million over five years to help drive research into energy storage. The bill is co-sponsored by Senators. Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.), Tina Smith (D-Minn.), Chris Coons (D-Del.), Cory Gardner (R-Colo.), Martha McSally (R-Ariz.) and Angus King (I-Maine).

5/15/19 – Phillip Swagel will replace Keith Hall in early June as director of the Congressional Budget Office. He previously served as an assistant Treasury secretary during the George W. Bush administration
5/9/19 — DOE Secretary Rick Perry, in response to questions from Representative Peter Welch (D-Vt.) and Chairman Frank Pallone (D-N.J.) on DOE’s lack of advancement of 16 energy efficiency standards for appliances required by a law passed in 2007, stated that, “We’re working hard to meet our legal obligations, deadlines to meet our regulations,” Perry said. “I have instructed staff to develop a plan to address missed deadlines. That plan is in the forthcoming regulatory agenda.”

5/6/19 — A total of 64 bipartisan lawmakers are part of a letter writing campaign to the U.S. Department of Agriculture expressing concern that the U.S. Forest Service could begin the sale of wild horses at Modoc National Forest “without restrictions.” They have concerns that “the Forest Service’s proposal would put wild horses at risk of being killed for food, and goes against California’s existing law prohibiting the sale or transfer of horses for human consumption.” The Department of Justice has argued previously that the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 "expressly allows" the agency to sell unadopted animals without limitation.

5/1/19 — The House Natural Resources Committee approved a bill, 22-14, that would bar oil and gas drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Specifically, the Arctic Cultural and Coastal Plain Protection Act, would repeal a key component of the 2017 tax law that opened the wildlife refuge to drilling. The bill is unlikely to be approved by Senate.

From the Administration

5/23/19 — FDA issued a letter to the food industry supporting the industry’s efforts to standardize voluntary date labeling if the date is simply used for quality—not safety. The letter noted that FDA strongly supports manufacturers’ use of the introductory phrase “Best If Used By” when they choose to apply a quality date label as research has shown that this phrasing helps consumers understand that the date label is about quality, not safety, and that products do not have to be discarded after the date if they are stored properly.

5/22/19 — DOI requested public comment on its 2017 decision to end the Interior Department’s federal coal leasing ban. In April the U.S. District Court for the District of Montana required the agency to formally justify undoing the agency’s decision to pause coal sales until federal officials determined whether leasing gave taxpayers a fair return on investment and adequately addressed climate impacts. The proposal will be open for a 15-day public comment period that will run through June 6 that concludes the action wouldn’t have much affect compared to waiting for the moratorium to expire as had been planned. A judge in April said former Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke had violated the National Environmental Policy Act when he lifted the Obama-era moratorium in 2017 without first undertaking an environmental study.

5/15/19 — The U.S. Energy Information Administration has launched its new State Energy Portal, where you can find data and analyses for U.S. states, territories, and regions and the District of Columbia.

5/13/19 — USDA announced grants and loans of $82 million through the Water and Waste Disposal Loan and Grant program. The program provides rural communities, water districts and other eligible entities can use the funds for drinking water, stormwater drainage and waste disposal systems. The projects must be in rural communities with 10,000 or fewer residents.

5/10/19 — USDA issued a notice that the U.S. Forest Service was undoing a previous determination that FY 2019 funding for the Secure Rural Schools Program was subject to a 6.2% reduction due to sequestration. The “new” funding is being distributed to states.

5/3/19 — USDA announced that milk producers are now eligible to receive a refund for a portion of their insurance premiums paid into the Margin Protection Program (MPP). The MPP was
an insurance type program enacted as part of the 2014 Farm Bill which was significantly altered and renamed to Dairy Margin Coverage Program in the 2018 Farm Bill, including refunding a portion of previously paid premiums.

4/30/19 – In a response to recent events affecting crop production, EPA proposed "management measures" for the herbicide glyphosate to reduce drift, while including a proposed mandate that labels disclose the risk of herbicide resistance. The proposal also strongly reaffirms its 2017 conclusion that glyphosate does not pose a cancer risk to humans but notes that glyphosate poses "potential risk" to mammals and birds only where the herbicide is sprayed but risks could be spread to plants in the ground and in water if the chemical drifts. The agency will take public comments on the proposal for 60 days.

4/30/19 – USDA released its A Case for Rural Broadband: Insights on Rural Broadband Infrastructure and Next Generation Precision Agriculture Technologies report. The report examines the economic case for expanded e-connectivity, finding that deployment of both broadband e-Connectivity and Next Generation Precision Agriculture Technology on farms and ranches throughout the U.S. could result in at least $47 billion in national economic benefits every year.

4/25/19 – DOI disbursed $214.9 million in FY 2018 energy revenues to the four Gulf oil and gas producing states—Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas—an increase of $26.95 million or 14.3% over the prior year. The funds from the second disbursement under Phase II of the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act of 2006 and will be used to support coastal conservation and restoration projects, hurricane protection programs, and activities to implement marine, coastal, or conservation management plans.

4/23/19 – USDA began accepting online applications for funding through the new ReConnect Rural Broadband Pilot Program. These funds are aimed at enabling the federal government to partner with the private sector and rural communities to build broadband infrastructure in areas with insufficient internet service. Insufficient service is defined as connection speeds of less than 10 megabits per second download and 1 megabit per second upload. ReConnect funding applications can be submitted here. For more information as well as evaluation criteria for applicants click here. As a reminder, applications may receive additional points if accompanied by letters from their respective states certifying certain criteria.