



Top Stories

2/17/17 – The Senate confirmed, [52-46](#), [Scott Pruitt](#) to be the 14th Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Pruitt served in the Oklahoma state legislature, prior to serving as the state's attorney general.

2/13/17 – USDA [released](#) the February 2017 Farm Income Forecast indicating that net farm income is forecast to decline by 8.7 percent to \$62.3 billion, marking the fourth consecutive year of declines after a record high in 2013. If realized, net farm income in 2017 will be the lowest since 2002, in inflation-adjusted terms.

2/8/17 – The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) [granted](#) an easement to Dakota Access, LLC allowing for the installation of 1.25 miles of pipeline that runs under federal lands at the Lake Oahe Reservoir in Cannon Ball, North Dakota. The easement follows the USACE's decision to terminate the Notice of Intent to Perform an Environmental Impact Statement. The action followed a presidential memorandum in late January [instructing](#) USACE to conduct an expedited review of the easement. The Cheyenne River and Standing Rock Sioux Tribes initiated legal proceedings to block the pipeline, but were denied an emergency request to stay construction, U.S. District Judge James Boasberg ruling that there was no "imminent harm" to the Cheyenne River or Standing Rock Sioux tribes.

2/3/17 – The White House [released](#) interim guidance on regulatory requirements to agencies for issuing new rules in response to an earlier executive order [issued](#) late January. The guidance specifies what types of new regulations would require, at least two prior regulations to be identified for elimination. The guidance also states that the cost of the planned regulation

must be offset by the elimination of existing costs associated with at least two prior regulations.

2/8/17 – In advance of Commissioner Norman Bay's departure, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) approved the [Atlantic Sunrise](#) and [Northern Access](#) natural gas pipeline projects. Atlantic, is a \$2.6 billion project, with work stretching between Pennsylvania and South Carolina. Northern Access, is a \$455 million project bringing gas to New York, New England, the Midwest and Canada. FERC also ruled in favor of [Energy Transfer Partners LP's Rover](#), \$4.2 billion, natural gas pipeline from Pennsylvania to Ontario. Following the Commissioner's departure, FERC [issued](#) an order delegating additional authority to agency staff to continue certain agency operations in the absence of a quorum of commissioners. The order grants additional authorities to senior staff surrounding electric and natural gas rate filings, time extensions, and the power to approve uncontested settlements. It does not grant powers to staff to authorize interstate natural gas pipeline certificates. FERC also [announced](#) the cancellation of its February monthly meeting, as well as all future commission sessions until leadership quorum is restored. All other previously scheduled meetings and events sponsored by FERC are still on.

From Congress

2/16/17—The U.S. House of Representatives Agriculture Committee approved the [Pesticide Registration Enhancement Act of 2017](#), which would be the fourth reauthorization of the Pesticide Registration Improvement and Extension Act that requires pesticide companies to pay EPA a fee in order to get their products reviewed for approval within regular time frames.

Additionally, the committee approved [H.R. 953](#), the fifth time the committee has supported removal of Clean Water Act requirements for pesticide application near waterways.

2/14/17 – The House Oversight and Government Reform Committee approved three regulatory reform measures, the "[Searching for and Cutting Regulations That Are Unnecessarily Burdensome \(SCRUB\) Act](#)," would authorize an appropriation of up to \$30 million to help establish a nine-member body that would assess which regulations are outdated or unnecessarily burdensome and would sunset after five years with a goal of reducing 15 percent of rules. The "[Regulatory Integrity Act](#)," would require agencies to disclose actions and public communications surrounding pending rules, and would prohibit agencies from using those communications to lobby the public for support. The "[Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs \(OIRA\) Insight, Reform and Accountability Act](#)," would establish a working group within OIRA to review regulations, streamline processing and aid small businesses with compliance.

2/14/17 – A bipartisan group of nearly 100 Congress members [sent](#) a letter to President Donald Trump requesting that the administration repost animal welfare documents removed from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's (APHIS) webpage regarding enforcement and oversight of the Animal Welfare Act, and Horse Protection Act. The documents include inspection reports from laboratories, dog and cat breeders, circuses, zoos, airlines and other facilities that deal with animals.

2/13/17 – Four Democrat Senators [urged](#) Trump to work with Congress to "improve the efficiency, uniformity, integrity, and responsiveness of the food safety system to ensure Americans' continued confidence" in food safety, following the findings of the Government Accountability Office's report, "[A National Strategy is Needed to Address Fragmentation in Federal Oversight](#)." The report indicates that current safety and quality of food supply is governed by 16 federal agencies, and recommends that the Executive Office of the President lead an effort to develop a national strategy to provide a framework for strengthening the system.

From the Administration

2/20/17 – USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) [extended](#) the comment period through April 19, on a [rule](#) which would require added sugars to be included on meat and poultry labels. The rule seeks to revise nutrition fact labels on meat and poultry products, bringing them in line with the Food and Drug Administration's [proposed](#) requirements.

2/14/17 – USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service [proposed](#) a Federal Milk Marketing Order (FMMO) regulating the handling of milk in California, which represents more than 20 percent of all U.S. milk production. The FMMO would regulate the purchase of milk between dairy farmers and the first buyer.

2/7/17 – USDA's Economic Research Service [released](#) a set of new fact sheets providing state-level agricultural data, as well as more general economic and demographic data.

2/7/17 – The National Transportation Board [concluded](#) that a broken axle on a grain car was the cause of the Casselton, N.D., train accident in which 476,000 gallons of crude oil spilled and ignited. The incident started when a train carrying grain derailed onto another track due to a broken axle on one of its cars, the train carrying crude oil was unable to stop in time before colliding with the derailed cars of the grain train.

2/6/17 – The U.S. will formally [allow](#) beef imports from France, ending a 19-year embargo imposed following outbreaks of mad-cow disease.

2/6/17 – USDA's Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration [pushed](#) back the effective date until April 22 of an interim final rule that lowers the legal burden needed by poultry growers to bring suit against chicken companies with whom they interact, and extended the comment period until Feb. 21 for two related proposed rules that seek to limit anti-competitive practices and change the industry's tournament system.

1/31/17 – The Government Accountability Office [released](#) a report on nuclear waste, indicating that benefits and costs

should be better understood before the Department of Energy (DOE) commits to a separate repository for defense-related waste. The report states that "the information DOE provided on the estimated costs and schedule was not well-documented, accurate, or credible, and it omitted billions of dollars in expected costs."

1/31/17 – FDA [published](#) steps that industry associations should take when helping members comply with new requirements in the Food Safety Modernization Act.

1/31/17 – The Lawrence Berkley National Laboratory [published](#) a report, "Putting the Potential Rate Impacts of Distributed Solar into Context." The report presents illustrative comparisons between the effects of distributed solar and other drivers of electricity prices.

Other

2/17/17 – The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit [ruled](#) that Virginia's moratorium on uranium mining can stand. The Court agreed with a decision from the district court that federal law does not preempt state regulation of conventional uranium mining,

2/8/17 – The Business Council for Sustainable Energy and Bloomberg New Energy Finance [released](#) a report finding that Americans spent less than 4 percent of average annual household income on energy in 2016, the lowest ever recorded. Additionally, spending on zero-carbon technologies in the U.S fell from \$63 billion in 2015 to \$59 billion in 2016 - the decline was attributed in part to falling costs of solar photovoltaic modules. U.S. wind energy investment rose 11 percent to \$15.5 billion, while "energy smart technologies" such as smart grid and electric vehicles rose 5 percent to \$10.6 billion.