

## ASA Works on Ag Issues in the U.S., Cuba and Europe

### Competition Issues in U.S. Ag

The American Soybean Association (ASA) submitted initial comments on Dec. 30, to the Department of Justice (DOJ) as DOJ and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) explore competition issues in the agriculture industry. ASA believes USDA should be more active in reviewing and providing recommendations to DOJ on agribusiness mergers and acquisitions.

"In recent years, we have seen increased consolidation in various agricultural industries," said ASA President Rob Joslin. "Many farmers have questioned why high levels of concentration have not been more thoroughly reviewed and analyzed by the federal government to determine their impact on competition."

In a letter to DOJ, ASA identified four principles that should guide agricultural competition: 1) competition within and among domestic industries must be safeguarded; 2) support innovation, including protecting patent rights; 3) following patent expiration, growers should see a reduction in prices through generic competition; and 4) foreign competitors should be subject to the same requirements and costs for accessing intellectual property as apply in the U.S.

In response to DOJ's request for comment, ASA distributed a survey to its producer-members asking for additional input. DOJ and USDA will be holding a series of public hearings on competition issues, with the first hearing scheduled for March 12, in Des Moines to focus on the seed industry. At that time ASA will provide more detailed comments.

### Ag Trade to Cuba

The ASA and other farm organizations are working with Congressional offices to move legislation this year to expand agricultural trade to Cuba. House Agriculture Committee Chairman Collin Peterson (D-MN) anticipates introducing legislation with Rep. Jerry Moran (R-KS), Agriculture Appropriations Chair Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), and Rep. Jo Ann Emerson (R-MO).

The legislation would: eliminate the need for U.S. businesses to go through banks in other countries to conduct agricultural trade (direct payment provision); require agricultural exports to Cuba to meet the same payment requirements as exports to other countries by

requiring payment when the title of the shipment changes hands (payment in advance provision); and allow U.S. citizens to travel to Cuba. A bill to lift travel restrictions was introduced in the House and Senate last year (H.R. 874 and S.428)

Current efforts are being directed at securing support and more co-sponsors for the bill.

### Ag Biotech Outreach in Europe

As part of an ongoing outreach program of the ASA Biotech Working Group, ASA Board member James Andrew, a soybean farmer from Jefferson, Iowa, and ASA Consultant Benno van der Laan visited Brussels, Belgium December 7-9, for meetings with Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and with officials from the main political groups. Informing MEPs on the safety and environmental benefits of biotech-enhanced crops is critical to maintaining U.S. soybean exports to the European Union valued at \$1.6 billion annually.

The objective of the meetings was to strengthen relationships with a range of influential newly-elected MEPs and with key parliamentary advisors in the European Parliament's relevant Committees at the beginning of Parliament's five-year mandate.

"During this mandate, the issue of biotech-enhanced crops is certain to be discussed in the Parliament," Andrew said. "As such, it is important for ASA to reach out to MEPs and their staff to bring them up-to-date on the importance of U.S. soy for European agriculture, the benefits of biotech-enhanced soybeans, and the problems for the EU livestock and poultry industries associated with the EU's slow approval process and zero tolerance for traces of unapproved biotech events."

Celebrating 90 years, ASA is a member supported organization that represents U.S. soybean farmers on legislative and regulatory issues that impact the soybean industry and soybean profitability.

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