

End of 2017 session on the horizon

With just under one week left in the 2017 legislative session, legislative leaders have been feverishly meeting in an attempt to get their work done by the constitutionally designated adjournment date of May 22. The focus during this homestretch will be for the GOP-controlled House of Representatives, the GOP-led Senate, and DFL Gov. Mark Dayton, to agree to the budget terms of the next two-year biennium, which is set to start on July 1.

Among the budget bills that

need to be advanced include agriculture, energy, environment, education, health and human services, state government and transportation. Other big ticket items included in these global negotiations include the possible passage of a tax bill and bonding bill. Some prognosticators have speculated that due to the large differences in spending priorities, as well as conflicting positions on a host of policy provisions, lawmakers might be faced with a special session in order to get all of their work done

before they leave St. Paul for the summer.

If the leaders are unable to come to an agreement by the end of June, the state would then enter into a partial government shutdown. The last time this happened was in 2011 when the GOP controlled the legislature and Dayton was serving his first year in office. The fallout from the shutdown is still palpable for lawmakers who were in office that year, so it is anticipated they will get their work done this year in a timely manner to avoid a repeat of 2011.

Cooperative Network urges lawmakers to delay implementation of buffer law

Cooperative Network recently signed onto a letter urging Governor Dayton and legislative leaders to delay implementation of the new buffer law due to its current provisions. A host of agriculture stakeholders groups, commodity groups and county commissioners throughout the state also signed onto the letter, which advised lawmakers to come to a satisfactory agreement this session on critical modifications needed for the new law to be effectively implemented.

The letter stated changes were needed in the classifications of private vs. public ditches, clarifications on what constitutes acceptable alternative practices, and indicated that some form of compensation and/or property tax relief for the taking of productive farmland out of production is required. The letter also stated that if modifications were not made prior to May 22, implementation of the new buffer law would be extremely challenging for the

following reasons:

- There are provisions of the buffer law that are not clear and it is causing confusion among both farmers and local government officials
- Local government officials throughout the state are having problems interpreting the new law, and helping farmers with compliance will be very challenging
- Crop farmers are already in the field with planting, beginning their busiest cycle of the year through the fall harvest – getting into compliance by Nov. 1 would be a real hardship
- Approved alternative practices were released just last month with more information forthcoming, making it extremely difficult for land owners to both decide and implement alternatives prior to the beginning of the planting season
- With these alternative practices being crucial for many farmers concerned about the loss of productive land, more time to implement is necessary

Cooperative Network testified earlier this session at a joint committee hearing with concerns regarding the buffer law, citing many of the reasons above, and raised the issue to over 50 policymakers at our annual Co-op Day at the Capitol earlier this session on March 15.

Resolutions Committee to meet on June 20

Cooperative Network's Resolutions Committee will meet Tuesday, June 20 in Eau Claire, Wis. to discuss submissions from various sector meetings. Proposed new resolutions or amendments to existing resolutions can be sent to patrick.murray@cooperativenetwork.coop. Existing resolutions can be accessed at Cooperative Network's website. Final action on the resolutions will take place at Cooperative Network's annual general meeting set for Nov. 14 – 15 in St. Paul, Minn.

Cooperative Network meets with Senator Franken and MDA Commissioner Frederickson



Cooperative Network's Patrick Murray (top left) and David Ward (bottom, second from left) recently joined MDA Commissioner Dave Frederickson, U.S. Senator Al Franken, and other stakeholders to discuss agriculture issues.

Cooperative Network recently met with U.S. Senator Al Franken (DFL-MN) and Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) Commissioner Dave Frederickson to discuss dairy, trade, immigration, healthcare and other related issues. Cooperative Network's members have been affected by a change in Canadian dairy regulations which took place earlier this year that curtailed the ability of U.S. dairy processors to sell ultra-filtered milk to Canada.

Cooperative Network stressed

Legislation allowing meeting flexibility for credit unions signed into law

Cooperative Network supported legislation to allow credit unions flexibility in how they notify members and allow them to use e-communication was recently signed into law by Gov. Dayton. S.F. 1190/H.F. 1477, authored by Sen. Andrew Mathews (R-Milaca) and Rep. Kelly Fenton (R-Woodbury), was included as a key lobbying issue for members during Co-op Day at the Capitol on March 15. The bill didn't change the requirement that members are notified of annual and special meetings and members who don't opt into electronic communications would still get paper notices. The legislation was supported overwhelmingly on both the Senate and House floors and was also supported by the Minnesota Department of Commerce. Another key aspect of the legislation is that

that the federal government should not impose a federally mandated supply management system as a solution, and that dairy cooperatives currently have the ability to work with their members to make production meet the needs of the marketplace.

Regarding healthcare for farmers and producers, Cooperative Network discussed the bi-partisan legislation it lead earlier this session to allow for the creation of healthcare cooperatives for farmers in Minnesota.

it would provide savings on printing & postage benefit for credit union members which would in turn lower fees and allow for higher rates of returns. We mentioned our collaborative work on this bill with our friends at the Minnesota Credit Union Network during their annual conference in April.

Co-op Calendar

June 20 – Resolutions Committee, *Eau Claire, Wis.*

Aug. 8 – Electric Sector Committee, *St. Cloud, Minn.*

Sept. 6 – Farm Supply, Grain and Fuel Committee, *Brainerd, Minn.*

Sept. 21 – Credit Issues Conference, *St. Cloud, Minn.*

Secretary Perdue proposes USDA reorganization

USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue is proposing a reorganization of the USDA. A new position, undersecretary for trade, would be created, and the undersecretary for rural development position would be abolished, with Perdue overseeing economic development programs. A new undersecretary slot, for farm production and conservation, would have jurisdiction over the Farm Services Agency (FSA), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Risk Management Agency (RMA). The position would replace the undersecretary for farm and foreign agricultural services, who now oversees FSA and the RMA, which is in charge of crop insurance. It would unite USDA conservation programs in one place. Presently, the FSA runs the Conservation Reserve, while NRCS is in charge of soil, water and wildlife stewardship working lands. Cooperative Network recognizes and supports the importance and value of elevating rural development.

Senior Co-op Housing Conference draws record attendance

The 18th annual Senior Cooperative Housing Conference was recently held May 1-2 in Bloomington, Minn. The one-of-a-kind conference was hosted by Cooperative Network and the Senior Cooperative Foundation. This year's theme was "Co-op Living: Moving into the Future." It attracted a record attendance of more than 325 participants to the country's heart of senior housing co-op development. Sixty cooperatives from five states were represented at the event, as well as 35 professional associations and five representatives from Minneapolis and Chicago HUD (Housing and Urban Development) offices.