Farm bill could impact biofuels, produce demand

By Matt Ernst, independent writer

In last month’s newsletter, we outlined some of the new farm bill’s implications for crop diversification at the farm level. This month, we broaden the focus to look at some of the new farm bill’s provisions that could impact demand for some diversified crops: biofuels programs and programs promoting produce consumption.

Biofuels

Energy programs are found in the Energy title of the farm bill (Title IX). Authorized program funding in this title is largest for two programs: 1) the biorefinery assistance program, re-named the “Biorefinery, Renewable Chemical, and Biobased Product Manufacturing Assistance Program;” and 2) the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP).

Biorefinery and similar assistance programs are funded at levels of $50 million to $100 million, annually, from FY 2014 to 2018. These funds are provided for loan guarantees to businesses promoting biorefinery and biobased product manufacturing. Since the program started, loans have been supported in eight states, including Michigan.

According to a farm bill analysis provided by the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives, mandatory funding for the REAP program will increase by an additional $20 million per year, from $48.2 million to $68.2 million. The REAP program, administered by USDA Rural Development, provides three funding programs:

1) The Renewable Energy System and Energy Efficiency Im-

Continued on Page 2
provement Guaranteed Loan and Grant Program, assisting agricultural producers and rural small businesses to make energy improvements. Kentucky producers have used funds to assist in updating grain drying technology. According to USDA, the program also provides for making energy efficiency improvements; using renewable technologies that reduce energy consumption; and participating in energy audits, renewable energy development assistance, and feasibility studies.

2) The Energy Audit and Renewable Energy Development Assistance Grant Program, which assists entities conducting energy audits and providing information on renewable energy development assistance for farm producers and rural communities.

3) The Feasibility Studies Grant Program, which can financially assist feasibility studies required for applications to many government energy programs.

Closer to the farm level, the Noninsured Crop Assistance Program (NAP 12305) provides some insurance provisions for crops for biomass. The bill also continues funding for the Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP), a program that incentivizes landowners in some counties to produce biomass crops. No Kentucky counties are currently eligible for this program; some counties in Ohio and Missouri have the program in place to produce miscanthus. The BCAP also subsidizes shrub willow production in New York and, in North Carolina, giant miscanthus and switchgrass production. The energy title also continues funding for programs in which the federal government purchases biobased products, including some forest products.

Overall, this farm bill appears to continue the current administration’s stated commitment to research and development for advanced biofuels. Potential implications for producers are likely more broad than the farm level, tied to research and development efforts as well as rural development initiatives that could potentially benefit larger communities.

Eating More Fruits and Veggies
Many Kentucky farmers market vendors have enjoyed expanded business from seniors using the Seniors Farmers Market Nutrition Program. This program is extended through FY 2018 in this farm bill. The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, for school produce purchases, is also extended and maintained at current levels. The Department of Defense (DOD) Fresh program is also continued.

New in this farm bill is the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Program. The USDA is authorized to spend $100 million to establish a grant program for projects providing incentives for SNAP participants to buy fruits and vegetables. What this means is that the sorts of vouchers available to SNAP participants for farmers market purchases may be coming for future grocery purchases.

In Summary
The direction this farm bill takes is to continue government spending for biofuels and alternative energy initiatives that could reach to the farm level. This is no surprise based on recent USDA cooperation with the Obama administration’s broader energy goals. Many analysts believe the jury is still out, however, as to whether the farm-level biomass production that is aimed for in some of the funded projects can become long-term reality.

Call for Kentucky Farmers Market Price Reporters
We’re still looking for a price reporter in the northeastern part of Kentucky. Is anyone a regular shopper at your farmers market? Do you attend a market almost every week? Do you shop at least once a week? The Center for Crop Diversification is looking for volunteers to record weekly prices at several farmers markets around the state. Our price reports are extremely useful for all of our farmers market vendors across the Commonwealth. Reporting weekly prices is a great way to help out your community farmers market, and it’s also a nice way to meet your farmers! To see the farmers market reports, visit this link: http://www.uky.edu/Ag/CCD/farmersmarket.html and, for more information about volunteering, please contact Miranda Hileman at miranda.hileman@uky.edu or 859-218-4384.
For nutrition, the direction is also toward incentivizing purchases of healthier foods by SNAP recipients. Here again, this is clearly a direction preferred by the administration. Some producers could potentially benefit if pilot programs were designed to provide local produce to be featured at grocery stores. However, the USDA still must write the regulations for the new program – and until those are released, possible implications for the program at the farm level are only speculative.

**KY industrial hemp update**

Interest in industrial hemp has intensified in recent years, and the signing of the 2014 Agricultural Act (the farm bill) in February opened the door for hemp production to return to Kentucky. Senate Bill 50, passed by the Kentucky General Assembly in 2013, exempted industrial hemp from the state controlled substances act, but also required Kentucky to follow the federal hemp rules and regulations. The farm bill authorized state departments of agriculture in states that have legalized the crop to administer hemp pilot programs. The Kentucky Department of Agriculture has established an Industrial Hemp Program as a result of Senate Bill 50 and the farm bill.

The KDA is initiating pilot programs across Kentucky, and is in the process of promulgating regulations in compliance with the farm bill. On April 1, 2014, Kentucky Attorney General Jack Conway notified Agriculture Commissioner James Comer that the farm bill “appears to exempt hemp pilot programs from the Controlled Substances Act,” which would allow those pilot programs to sell the industrial hemp they produce. Growers interested in participating in pilot programs should complete the application available on the KDA’s website at [http://www.kyagr.com/marketing/documents/Industrial-Hemp-program-application.pdf](http://www.kyagr.com/marketing/documents/Industrial-Hemp-program-application.pdf).

Thus far, the pilot programs will be affiliated with the University of Kentucky, Kentucky State University, Eastern Kentucky University, Murray State University, Morehead State University, and the University of Louisville. Each project will have its own research focus. These include the cultivation of Kentucky heirloom hemp seed; the cultivation of European seed for research on hemp fiber; the detoxifying and environmental effects of hemp; basic hemp production practices and production costs; the feasibility of hemp as a source of renewable energy; and medical research. A big challenge to getting the pilot programs started has been acquiring seed.

For more information about the KDA’s Industrial Hemp Program, go to [http://www.kyagr.com/marketing/hemp-pilot.html](http://www.kyagr.com/marketing/hemp-pilot.html)

**UK’s production resources**

*By Miranda Hileman, Senior Extension Associate*

It’s time to get planting and planning for the 2014 growing season. Whether you’re growing a garden in your backyard or you are a commercial vegetable producer, it’s time for action! The University of Kentucky has two great publications that are very helpful in planning.

The first, Home Vegetable Gardening in Kentucky (ID-128), covers a wide range of issues associated with planning and preparing your garden space. Soil Preparation, crop rotation, and organic gardening are all topics covered before you get to planting and caring for your garden area. Irrigating, mulching, fertilizing, composting and cover crops are also covered alongside ways to control diseases, insects and weeds. This publication also includes information about container gardening,
intensive gardening and mini-gardens. Crop specific information is available at the end of the publication for 36 common vegetables grown in Kentucky vegetable gardens. ID-128 was edited by Dr. Rick Durham, Extension Professor for Consumer (Home) Horticulture, with contributions from faculty in the departments of Horticulture, Entomology, and Plant Pathology. If you are new to gardening, this is the publication for you. Please check it out if you are interested in starting a garden this year, or if you’re looking to try some new crops. It is available at http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/id/id128/id128.pdf

The second publication is the Vegetable Production Guide for Commercial Growers, 2014-2015 (ID-36), which provides recommendations on varieties of 17 groups of vegetables. The varieties that are recommended have been selected through extensive trialing at the University of Kentucky and on farms throughout the Commonwealth. Insect, disease and weed management information is available alongside insecticide, herbicide, fungicide and pesticide recommendations. Alternative cultural controls are also included. This publication is geared toward growers who already have an understanding of planting and caring for their crops. Edited by Dr. Ric Bessin, Extension Professor of Entomology, with contributions from Horticulture and Plant Pathology faculty, it can be found at http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/id/id36/id36.pdf

Meet the Center’s Christy Cassady

Extension Specialist Christy Cassady has worked as coordinator of the Center for Crop Diversification since its inception as the New Crop Opportunities Center in July of 2000. As coordinator, she designed and maintains the Center’s website, writes and edits Center publications, travels to field days and meetings to distribute the Center’s crop and marketing profiles, gives presentations, and fields questions from Extension agents and growers about a variety of crop diversification topics. She has also managed the grants that have funded the Center since it was established. In addition to her role with the Center, Christy is responsible for maintaining the Department of Horticulture website and the Home & Garden section of the College of Agriculture, Food and Environment website.

A former journalist, Christy returned to college part-time in 1996 to study horticulture at the University of Kentucky. After graduating in 1999, she worked part-time as an Extension Associate in the UK Department of Horticulture, developing educational products on horticultural topics, including CDs and fact sheets on trees for Kentucky landscapes. During her time as coordinator, the Center has developed 156 crop profiles, and 23 marketing profiles to help growers make decisions about which crops and marketing channels are best suited for their enterprises.

Alabama Extension offers Horticultural Retailer Program

By Dr. Ayanava Majumdar, Auburn University

The Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES) Commercial Horticulture Team has a program known as the Certified Horticultural Retailer (CHR) Training Program. Fruit and vegetable, nursery, landscape and greenhouse industries are part of a thriving local economy in Alabama. Retail centers in small and large cities are the backbone of this horticulture industry. Input suppliers are not only part of the gardening and farming communities, but also serve as local consultants. Therefore, it is important to provide technical training to horticultural retailers, and ACES is proud to fill this training need. Summer training classes for CHR are May 13th, 14th and 15th at three locations.

The Certified Horticultural Retailer (CHR) is a special fee-based training program that provides
basic and advanced horticultural training to employees working at home garden, landscape, and retail centers directly from qualified professionals. The CHR program delivers business-specific multi-track training incorporating conventional and organic inputs for home garden and commercial fruit, vegetable, landscape, greenhouse and nursery industries. The CHR program will prepare retailers/store managers for better serving their clientele.

Participants will receive a complete set of Extension publications, specially designed training certificate and badge, and lawn displays immediately after each session. Participants will also be included in the CHR brochure that will be circulated statewide and online to recognize agricultural businesses that have successfully completed the training program. Training classes are being prepared and will be available in the near future. Please contact a Commercial Horticulture Regional Extension Agent for immediate registration. The detailed CHR brochure and agenda is available at http://www.aces.edu/anr/chr/.

**Alabama IPM resources are abundant, informational**

*By Dr. Ayanava Majumdar, Auburn University*

The Alabama Vegetable IPM program is a unique tool that is available through many different outputs. One Google search on Alabama IPM will load you with a plethora of links available. Resources for IPM range from social media, blogs, and newsletters that reach a variety of audiences.

The Alabama IPM program’s website is part of the Integrated Pest Management Communication Resources project funded by federal and state grants since 2009. IPM-CORE is designed to reach thousands of Alabama vegetable producers and gardeners through the synchronized use of modern communication channels. IPM-CORE aims to benefit the conventional as well as the organic/transitioning and beginning farmers. Useful links on this website include pest identification and scouting techniques, extension presentations and bulletins, newspaper and magazine articles and much more. Visit the website at www.aces.edu/go/87.

Another resource the IPM program develops are educational videos (You Tube) as part of training modules that help producers actually view techniques. An example of one educational video is using trap crops and botanical insecticides for vegetable production. An Impact video is also available that shows how IPM techniques have benefited producers. These videos are available on the IPM website.

Training modules on certain topics, such as using trap crops, are also available online. These modules help you understand each topic through a series of educational links that guide an audience through the applications.

If you are interested in reading the latest news and information on IPM, the Commercial Horticulture Blog is updated regularly with important articles on current events. Likewise, the Alabama Vegetable IPM Facebook page is a great tool to view upcoming events, articles, industry leader updates and more. Social media in these times have taken a major role in people’s lives across the world, and the IPM program utilizes it to reach a large audience. There is even an IPM Twitter account for those producers who have the time and keep up with social media. Visit our Facebook page, https://www.facebook.com/pages/AlabamaVegetable-IPM/110601312341489?ref=stream&hc_location=stream, or Twitter page, https://twitter.com/AlabamaIPM, for further details.

To subscribe to the Alabama IPM Communicator
NRCS program offers help with conservation practices

By Christy Morgan, NRCS

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offers landowners financial and technical assistance for conservation practices through the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).

CSP is a voluntary program, authorized by farm bill legislation, encouraging land stewards to improve their conservation performance. Through CSP, agriculture producers receive financial and technical assistance to adopt additional conservation activities to address priority resource concerns.

As part of the application process, landowners work with NRCS staff to complete a resource inventory using a Conservation Measurement Tool (CMT) to determine the conservation performance for existing and additional conservation activities. Examples of the questions within the inventory tool could be:

- Have you conducted an energy audit on your farm and are now implementing the energy audit actions?
- Does your rotation or management system contain a cover crop that you do not harvest?
- Has a thinning or improvement harvest been completed within the last 10 years on your forest land?
- Do you have an adequate grazing and roughage supply to meet forage demands of livestock and wildlife?
- Do you have in-stream structures on your property, such as diversion dams, road crossings (bridges or culverts), low-water crossings, and pumping stations?

By implementing these and other conservation measures, farmers and ranchers can improve the long-term productivity and sustainability of their agricultural operation, improve the condition of crops and forage for livestock, reduce the cost for fuel, labor, fertilizers and pesticides, and improve the energy efficiency of the overall operation.

CSP provides two types of payments through five-year contracts: annual payments for installing new conservation activities and maintaining existing practices; and supplemental payments for adopting a resource-conserving crop rotation. Producers may be able to renew a contract if they have successfully fulfilled the initial contract and agree to achieve additional conservation objectives.

Eligible lands include private agricultural land like cropland, grassland, pastureland, rangeland and non-industrial private forest land. CSP is available to all producers, regardless of operation size or type of crops produced. For information about how to apply for assistance through CSP and deadlines specific to the available application periods, visit your local NRCS office (http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?agency=nrcs).

There is also a step-by-step guide to explain the process of getting started with NRCS conservation assistance online at: (http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/about/).

Tomato diseases program

University of Kentucky Plant Pathologist Kenny Seebold will discuss tomato diseases at the Robinson Center for Appalachian Resource Sustainability on April 14 at 6 p.m. The presentation, part of the Mountain Monday Series, will take place in the Robinson Center Auditorium.

Topics will include common tomato diseases, general management practices to help prevent diseases, and fungicides and spray schedules for tomato disease management.

For more information, contact Jackie Allen at 606-666-2438 Extension 291, or jackie.allen@uky.edu.

If you are unable to attend the presentation, you can view it over the Internet at http://www.ustream.tv/channel/mountainmonday.
Homebased Microprocessor workshops available in April

There is still time to become a certified Home-based Microprocessor in order to sell higher risk products such as canned tomatoes, pickled fruits and vegetables, salsa, barbecue sauce, pepper or herb jellies, herbal vinegars, low- and no-sugar jams and jellies, and pressure canned vegetables. Seven more workshops are available in April 2014. Visit http://www2.ca.uky.edu/agcomm/micro/ to learn more and to register for workshops. Contact Debbie Clouthier at 859-257-1812 or debbie.clouthier@uky.edu for more information.

High tunnel meeting a success

March 20th brought a great Vegetable Academy program about high tunnels to the Lincoln County area. Forty-two Participants heard from six University of Kentucky Extension Specialists about vegetable production in high tunnels. The daylong program covered a variety of topics, including nutrients, irrigation, weed and insect management, disease control, economics and marketing, tomato varieties, and equipment considerations.

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Thanks for reading, and please contact Miranda at miranda.hileman@uky.edu if you are interested in subscribing to our online newsletter.

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