

Farmers' Crisis Cues Funding Squabble

Democrats and Republicans will continue the discussion of aid when the Senate reconvenes in September.

BY COURTNEY HATHAWAY
Assistant State & National Editor

U.S. Republican and Democratic legislators are still squabbling over an emergency aid package for struggling farmers, while an unlucky combination of a year of bad weather and low prices has the farmers fighting to keep their heads above water.

To further emphasize their struggle, hundreds of U.S. farmers and ranchers are flying to Washington on Sept. 13 to continue lobbying efforts for more emergency funding and to confront legislators.

Erika Hovland, communications director for the National Farmers Union, said the farmers planned to lobby for adequate short-term assistance and longer-term relief.

The \$7.5 billion package designated to aid farmers in need was not included in the Senate's standard appropriations, said Mark Kimball, spokesman for Sen. Tom Daschle, D-S.D. Last year the Senate spent \$6 billion on emergency relief, he said. The package has not yet passed in the House.

Kimball said Senate Democrats had originally pushed for \$11 billion for relief, but the Republicans thought that amount was unnecessary. "We're happy with what we got," Kimball said. "We had to drag (the Republicans) kicking and screaming all the way."

He said a conference committee has been organized and should be able to reach a compromise when Congress reconvenes in September. "This would provide immediate aid to make sure farmers can farm another day," said Andy McDonald, spokesman for Sen. Paul Wellstone, D-Minn.

"The greater challenge is to get out of the price crisis, which is what is making life so miserable for farmers," he said. "Prices are at a record low and show no signs of rebounding."

McDonald said the farmers' plight would ripple out into the surrounding communities. "We're faced with farmers who are in freefall which affects whole communities," he said. "For example, banks give loans to farmers but farmers can't pay them back."

But some Republicans think the relief program is too much too soon.

Andy Fisher, spokesperson for Sen. Richard Lugar, R-Ind., said the

Republicans were wary of spending more money until after Congress reconvenes in September.

"We won't have a full understanding of the farm crisis until after Labor Day," Fisher said.

"We shouldn't put that much money into it until we know how it will best help farmers."

But Hovland said providing emergency relief money was not enough.

"Something's not working," she said. "They shouldn't have to keep coming back every year passing emergency relief programs."

Prices have reached record low levels, she said.

"There's been a pretty extreme decline in commodity prices," she said. "They've been declining since the latter part of 1997. (The result has been) a decline in farm incomes."

Hovland said the forecasted prices for the coming year indicated even more price drops. Wheat prices are expected to drop 42 percent, corn prices 39 percent and soybeans 26 percent. The net farm income is projected to be 16.5 percent lower than 1996 levels. But she said the net farm income would be 33.4 percent lower than 1996 after government assistance was deducted.

Hovland said meat prices have also been affected. Hog prices have fallen 20 percent since 1996, and cattle prices have

fallen five percent. "This crisis is unique because it's across the board," she said. The low prices are a result of the drought, the Asian economic crisis, and demand decrease.

Kimball said the meatpacker monopoly was largely to blame for low meat prices. "The meat industry is concentrated within a few companies," he said.

Kimball gave an example of a ham. He said a family might pay \$30 for a good cut of ham, but the farmer might have sold the entire hog to the meatpacker for \$30.

Kimball said it cost the farmers more to raise prices than their profit from selling it. "Good producers are going out of business," he said. "And consumers are paying more for food than they probably should."

"The situation is dire," he said. "We've seen it happening for two years, and we don't need to wait anymore."

Hovland said she agreed the situation was perilous. "The danger is that this will drive family farmers and ranchers out of business," Hovland said. "Then who will be producing our food?"

The State & National Editor can be reached at stntdesk@unc.edu.

"(The aid package) would provide immediate aid to make sure farmers can farm another day."

ANDY McDONALD
Congressional Spokesman

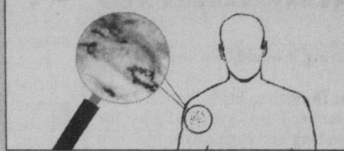
Rashes of Syphilis

Orange County and Durham County residents have reported a dramatic increase in syphilis cases from 1997-1998. Experts from the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services blame drugs and prostitution.

Number of Syphilis Infections by County

County	1997	1998
Alamance	34	44
Durham	44	83
Forsyth	156	85
Guilford	260	180
Orange	17	39

Enlargement of second stage syphilis infection:



The Stages of Syphilis and Treatments

Stage 1: The first symptom of syphilis appears as a small, round sore (known as a chancre). Appearing at the point of bacterium entrance, the chancre goes away in one to five weeks.

Treatment for Stage 1: Single injection of penicillin.

Stage 2: A rash breaks out in patches on the skin. The rash can be accompanied by fever, sore throat and fatigue. These symptoms disappear in two to six weeks.

Treatment for Stage 2: Three doses of penicillin injections.

Stage 3: No visible symptoms are found in this stage. The bacteria begins to attack internal organs including the brain, heart and liver. If left untreated, infection may be fatal.

Treatment for Stage 3: A 10-day intravenous treatment of penicillin.

SOURCE: CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL, DR. BILL MILLER, N.C. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

DITHIDAN HELLIAS

County Syphilis Cases on Rise

Officials say the growing level of syphilis in Orange County mirrors outbreaks in other counties along I-40.

BY BART WOJDYNSKI
Staff Writer

Health officials believe that drug use and prostitution are the largest factors in a dramatic increase in syphilis over the past few years in Orange and several other North Carolina counties.

The groups that have been most affected are men and women in their late thirties, said Dr. Kim Fox, medical epidemiologist for the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services.

The number of reported cases of syphilis in Orange County more than doubled from 17 in 1997 to 39 in 1998. Durham county showed a similar increase, from 44 to 83 reported cases.

"The syphilis problem in North Carolina has, as in other epidemics, been linked to crack cocaine," Fox said. "The big risk factors have been use of crack, trading sex for money or drugs and high numbers of sexual partners."

Bill Miller, professor of epidemiology at the UNC-CH School of Public Health, said he did not know the cause of the outbreak, but he saw a clear pattern.

"There seems to be a wave moving from west to east," he said. "There was an increase in Guilford County, then Alamance, Orange, and Durham and Wake counties, subsequently. It's moved eastward along the I-40 - I-85 corridor."

According to the Web site for the Centers, www.cdc.gov, the South as a whole has had particularly high syphilis rates in recent years.

Eight southern states had rates anywhere from 2 to 12 times higher than the overall national rate.

Syphilis is a treatable disease that is transmitted through sexual contact or from mother to child. Unless the disease is treated, the appearance of a sore will be followed by a rash that may vary in appearance. Like the sore, the rash will disappear on its own, usually within 5 weeks. If left untreated, the disease can ultimately lead to death.

To control the spread of the disease, the state health department has appropriated grants to eliminate syphilis from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in five North Carolina counties: Orange, Durham, Alamance, Forsyth, and Guilford.

The state health department used the funds to establish an outreach educator, or "syphilis eliminator" position in each of the five counties. The educator will use money from the grants to coordinate prevention and education programs.

"First of all, we are going to set up

syphilis prevention programs in jail settings and rehab centers," said Lateacha Hodge, outlook educator for Orange County. "We're also going to go out to community functions to spread the word."

Syphilis is treated by penicillin, Miller said. The administration and duration of the treatment depends on the stage of the disease that is being treated. According to the CDC, the best defense against syphilis is the proper use of a condom during any kind of sex.

The City Editor can be reached at citydesk@unc.edu.

Bug Plagues New E-mail Software

The glitch in Microsoft's "MSN Messenger" system gives strangers access to others' e-mail accounts.

Associated Press

WASHINGTON - Microsoft Corp. acknowledged Thursday a bug in its new Internet chat software that permits coworkers and others to see a person's e-mail password.

It promised to fix it by week's end. The glitch in the company's new "MSN Messenger" software means that others who have access to a person's computer could impersonate that person to read and even send e-mail using his "Hotmail" account without anyone's knowledge.

Microsoft said that even if customers delete their saved password and enter it manually, it still becomes visible if another person types a specific sequence of strokes on that computer.

Microsoft, whose software runs most of the world's personal computers, promised to fix the problem by the end of Friday.

The company said it was made aware of the bug earlier this week.

Deanna Sanford, the product manager for MSN, said the bug's ill effects were mitigated because a person must have physical access to the victim's computer, meaning the problem will be worse in offices than for home users.

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DATE Sunday, Aug. 22

TIME 2:30 pm - 4:15 pm

PLACE Kenan Stadium in Chapel Hill

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SCHEDULE:

2-3 pm	Kenan Football Center Hall of Honor open
2:30 pm	Gates 5, 6 & 7 open on the South Side of Kenan Stadium
3:10 pm	Players & coaches introduced by Woody Durham
3:15-4:15 pm	"Meet the Tar Heels" Autograph session on the field

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