

### SAFETY NET, RESEARCH FUNDING HIGH ON NAFA LIST OF PRIORITIES FOR DC FLY-IN

The need for a legitimate safety net for alfalfa farmers, as well as enhanced research funding were just two of the priorities stressed during NAFA's 7<sup>th</sup> Annual DC Fly-In, held February 6-9. With all signs pointing to an early start in crafting the next farm bill, NAFA members made sure lawmakers were aware that alfalfa is one of the country's most valuable field crops and key to sustainable agricultural systems. Being recognized in policy and research funding decisions is critical to keeping pace with other cropping choices.

High on the list of concerns was the lack of an adequate safety net for alfalfa. Due to the fact that alfalfa is not a Title I program crop, alfalfa farmers do not have access to the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) options which were made available in the previous farm bill to growers of program crops. In the absence of adequate coverage options for alfalfa, the planting of alfalfa is intrinsically discouraged in favor of program crops which possess greater risk protection, especially when operating loans are involved. Thus, the need for a legitimate safety net, on par with other cropping choices, is critical. In addition to meeting with congressional offices on the safety net issue, NAFA also met with the Risk Management Agency on continued efforts to develop a quality and/or revenue program, and enhance and expand forage seeding program coverage.

Research funding for alfalfa was also stressed by NAFA members during the Fly-In as enhanced funding for the Alfalfa Seed and Alfalfa Forage Systems Research Program (AFRP) and an additional \$10 million investment in alfalfa research at USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) were the focus.

The AFRP, awarded \$1.35 million in fiscal years '14 and '15, and \$2 million in '16 and '17, has provided critical research funding to alfalfa researchers in 27 states. From New York to California and from Washington to Georgia, AFRP funding is addressing critical alfalfa research needs across the country. Building upon this success, NAFA members focused on priorities the AFRP addresses, the long list of states receiving research funding, and the increasing inertia within the alfalfa research community, to build the case for increasing AFRP to \$5 million for 2018. While AFRP funding does not level the playing field in terms of research funding between alfalfa and program crops, it is a significant step forward in bringing parity to public research funding for alfalfa. NAFA representatives also stressed the need for an increased investment of \$10 million in alfalfa research at USDA-ARS to better balance the ARS research portfolio.

To complement research funding received through AFRP, NAFA created the first-ever U.S. Alfalfa Farmer Research Initiative (aka Alfalfa Checkoff Program), a farmer-funded investment in alfalfa-related research. The checkoff officially launched January 1 and the collection of the \$1/bag is being facilitated by seed marketers.

"Through our new checkoff, the alfalfa industry is clearly demonstrating its commitment to funding alfalfa research," said Beth Nelson, NAFA President. "This program was created to enhance the research funding provided at the public level and share in the obligation to fund critical industry research needs."

The checkoff will support research into the improvement of yields and forage quality; weed, insect, and cutting management strategies; and fertility, soil management, soil health, and macro/micro nutrients. *(For more information regarding the checkoff or for a list of facilitating marketers, visit [www.alfalfa.org](http://www.alfalfa.org).)*

NAFA focused its meetings on members of the House and Senate Agriculture Committees, as well as members Agriculture Appropriations Committees. In addition to Congressional meetings, NAFA met with: 1) EPA to maintain communication about crop protection tools for the industry; 2) USDA's Risk Management Agency to expand and improve its crop insurance programs for the alfalfa industry; and 3) USDA-ARS to discuss the need to increase its financial commitment to alfalfa research.

"Overall, our meetings were very encouraging," Nelson added. "We enjoy coming out here and sharing alfalfa's story – it's such a positive one, especially as Farm Bill discussions begin to develop. It's important that we make our positions known."



L to R: NAFA representatives John Ruedinger (WI), Randy Welch (WI), Dan Wiersma (IA), Ernie Johnson (MT), Dan Funke (IA).



Congressman James Comer (R-KY) (left) with NAFA Director Ray Smith.



NAFA Directors Darrin Unruh (left) and Ray Smith.