

RESEARCH FUNDING, SAFETY NET THE FOCUS OF 9TH ANNUAL DC FLY-IN

A greater investment in public research devoted to alfalfa and legitimate risk management tools that provide a safety net for alfalfa farmers were the focus of the National Alfalfa & Forage Alliance's 9th Annual DC Fly-In held February 4-7. With more than 100 agency and Capitol Hill meetings scheduled over the three-day event, NAFA representatives met with lawmakers to stress the importance of increased funding for alfalfa research at USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS), as well as increased funding for the Alfalfa Seed and Alfalfa Forage Systems Research Program (AFRP) administered by USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). Current support within USDA for alfalfa research pales in comparison to major program crops despite the fact that alfalfa is the nation's 3rd most valuable field crop.

NAFA representatives met with agency officials and regulators, as well as House and Senate Ag and Ag Appropriations Committee members, to discuss NAFA's list of legislative priorities. Meetings with House and Senate Ag Committees members focused on the continued need for a legitimate and reliable risk management tool which provides alfalfa farmers protection against losses in both revenue and quality, a product currently available to farmers of many other program crops, but not alfalfa. Additionally, since alfalfa is not a program crop, the risk management tools contained in the Farm Bill – Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage – are not available to alfalfa farmers. Addressing this disparity would end the incentive for farmers to shift acres away from alfalfa into other crops currently covered by those programs.

Meetings were also held with members of the House and Senate Ag Appropriations Committees to discuss funding needs for the AFRP and investments in alfalfa research at USDA's Agricultural Research Service. The public research investment devoted to alfalfa is only a fraction of that dedicated to program crops.

NAFA's DC Fly-In participants also met with: 1) the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to present information regarding how alfalfa seed is produced, the kinds of pollinators alfalfa seed farmers use, and the great lengths to which alfalfa seed farmers go to protect, maintain, and enhance their pollinators; 2) USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) to discuss risk management tools needed by alfalfa farmers to reach parity with those available for other major crops; 3) USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) to discuss how best to use limited research funding to the greatest benefit of the alfalfa industry; and 4) USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) to discuss the AFRP.

"It's extremely important that we continue a dialogue with lawmakers," said Beth Nelson, President of the National Alfalfa & Forage Alliance. "We've made tremendous strides in advocating for alfalfa industry priorities, but we need to remain vigilant and persistent in our efforts if we want that success to continue."



(L to R): NAFA Director Dave Reynolds, Vicki Risch, Senator James Risch (R-ID), NAFA Fly-In participant Jeff Hartman.



Congressman Kelly Armstrong (L) (R-ND) and NAFA Fly-In participant Ben Kuhn.



Senator John Hoeven (L) (R-ND) and NAFA Fly-In participant Ben Kuhn.



(L to R): NAFA Directors Steve Welker, Jarrod McGinnis, Drex Gauntt, Chris Pratt, Congresswoman Alma Adams (D-NC), NAFA Fly-In participant Alyson Hayunga.



(L to R) NAFA Fly-In participant Scott Duffner, NAFA Director Ron Cornish, Congressman TJ Cox (D-CA), NAFA Director Dan Putnam, NAFA Communication Director Chelsea Russell, NAFA Director Mike Lauwers.



Senator John Barrasso (L) (R-WY) and NAFA Director Morgan Grover.



(L to R): NAFA Directors Doug Walsh, Mark Wagoner, NAFA Fly-In participant Scott Duffner, Congressman Jim Hagedorn (R-MN), NAFA Fly-In participant Randy Welch, NAFA Associate Director Jon Dockter.



Congressman Glenn Grothman (L) (R-WI) and NAFA Director John Ruedinger.



(L to R) Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee Collin Peterson (D-MN), NAFA Fly-In participant David Yost, NAFA Director Shawn Barnett.