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## Weekly Update from the Texas Seed Trade Association

### Member & Seed Related News



**Texas Seed Trade Past President Margaret Shields** receives her past president's recognition. Margaret transitioned from President to Past President during the covid era and the annual meeting handing the reins to the incoming President Doug Richards was cancelled. Thus Margaret's service as TSTA president was never fully acknowledged. Dr. Shields was the first woman to serve as Texas Seed Trade Association President.

Margaret left West Texas several years ago and now works for Pan American Seed Company in Santa Paula, California. Margaret wanted to get back to her "plant geek" roots and be a breeder again after managing far too many people at Bayer and BASF. Ornamentals is a new experience for Margaret and she's loving it! Spoiler alert - Margaret is managing the location for Pan Am but she is nevertheless an active breeder - again.

It was wonderful to visit with Margaret and her family and catch up a bit while TSTA staff was on vacation! Thank you Margaret for your service to the Texas Seed Trade Association!



The board of directors of the Texas Seed Trade Association will convene their summer

meeting on July 8-10, at the Horseshoe Bay Resort near Marble Falls.

## **DESPITE PROGRESS, FARM BILL PASSAGE GROWING MORE UNLIKELY IN 2024**

by Ryan Hanrahan, University of Illinois' FarmDoc project

Despite recent progress on the 2024 Farm Bill -- including passage of the House Agriculture Committee's version of the bill and competing frameworks released in the Senate Agriculture Committee -- lawmakers in recent days have been hinting that passage of a full Farm Bill in 2024 is growing more unlikely and that another extension of the 2018 Farm Bill remains the most likely outcome before an end of September deadline.

*Agri-Pulse's* Steve Davies, Philip Brasher, Noah Wicks, and Rebekah Alvey reported this past Friday that "a farm bill doesn't appear to be headed anywhere in the Senate, even though Ag Committee Republicans have now outlined their proposal. Senate Ag Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., doesn't think the House Ag Committee's bill can pass the House and fears a Senate bill could face the same fate, she says on this week's *Agri-Pulse* Newsmakers."

"I don't want to bring a bill out of the committee in the Senate that has the same fate' as the House bill, she says," according to Davies, Brasher, Wicks and Alvey. "Stabenow has rejected the GOP proposals in part because of cuts to nutrition spending and their removal of climate guardrails on Inflation Reduction Act funding. 'The way you get a farm bill is making sure everybody's happy. And so that recognition hasn't happened yet,' she said."

In addition, *Brownfield Ag News's* Brent Barnett reported Friday that "U.S. Senator Roger Marshall says a new farm bill isn't likely to get passed this year."

"I think we're looking at another extension and I'm sorry to say that,' he said," according to Barnett. "I'm not going to do a bad bill. This is a five-year bill. We have to get it right."

Where is the Bill in the Legislative Process?

While lawmakers have recently signaled that a full Farm Bill is unlikely to pass in 2024, *Progressive Farmer's* Joshua Baethge reported this past Friday that odds remain quite low that a full Farm Bill will pass this year because lawmakers have completed only a very small percentage of the steps required for a Farm Bill to become law.

"Looking at the legislative process from an uber simplistic perspective, eight things that need to happen for a new farm bill to become reality:

The agriculture committees in the House and Senate need to pass a bill. The full House and Senate must then approve those bills. When that happens, a committee will likely be created to hammer out a compromise between the two bills.

The full House and Senate must then approve the compromise. The President would then need to sign the bill into law.

In case you weren't counting, that's eight separate steps that need to be completed," Baethge reported. "So far, lawmakers have finished one. In May, the House Agriculture Committee passed Rep. Glenn "GT" Thompson's Farm, Food, and National Security Act. That means one-eighth of the process has been completed."

### **Some Optimism Remains**

Some lawmakers have said they remain optimistic that a Farm Bill could still see progress, however, including Sen. Chuck Grassley, who said that "movement on the Senate's

version of the farm bill isn't likely to happen this month," according to reporting from Brownfield Ag News' Barnett, but that "he has some optimism that momentum will pick up later this summer."

"I've had good conversation with Senator (Debbie) Stabenow,' he said," according to Barnett. "She discussed her bill more than just the framework with me, and I think she's making a good faith effort to move ahead."

## **USDA PROPOSES NEW RULE TO CLARIFY UNFAIR PRACTICES IN THE LIVESTOCK, MEAT, AND POULTRY INDUSTRIES**

Source: USDA news release

WASHINGTON, - Today, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced new action to support the Biden-Harris Administration's plan for a fairer, more competitive, and more resilient meat and poultry supply chain. USDA's **Fair and Competitive Livestock and Poultry Markets proposed rule** would tackle longstanding challenges around interpretations of unfairness and competitive injury for the livestock, meat, and poultry sectors. This will support farmers and growers, and continues President Biden's work to lower food costs for consumers.

Secretary Vilsack made the announcement during an event at the Center for American Progress showcasing the Administration's agenda to create more affordable and competitive agricultural markets. The event highlighted USDA's wide-ranging progress to enhance the Department's ability to enforce the Packers and Stockyards Act, including previous rulemaking and an enforcement partnership with the Department of Justice. The event also provided a look back at USDA's successful Investing in America Agenda efforts to enhance independent meat and poultry and other diversified food processing capacity; expand domestic, innovative fertilizer production; create a fairer market for seeds and other agricultural inputs; and support more robust and resilient supply chains. USDA also released a fact sheet highlighting its actions under the Biden-Harris Administration to spur competition in the agriculture sector.

"Entrenched market power and the abuses that flow from it remain an obstacle to achieving lower prices for consumers and fairer practices for producers," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. "Today's proposed rule stands for clear, transparent standards so that markets function fairly and competitively for consumers and producers alike. With our whole-of-government approach to competition and resiliency, the Biden-Harris Administration is fighting every day to lower costs for American families and give farmers a fairer shake."

The proposed rule will better protect farmers, ranchers, and other covered market participants by making clearer how prohibitions on unfair practices will be enforced under the Packers and Stockyards Act. Specifically, the rule provides clearer tests and frameworks around unfair practices that harm market participants individually and unfair practices that harm markets overall. If finalized, this rule would better enable USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service to carry out its legal obligation to ensure fair and competitive national livestock, meat, and poultry markets and ensure livestock producers and poultry growers can secure the full value for their products and services.

"Farmers, ranchers, consumers, and smaller processors all depend upon the Packers & Stockyards Act to protect them from bad actors in the marketplace," said USDA's Senior Advisor for Fair and Competitive Markets Andy Green. "It's time to provide the regulatory clarity and simplicity needed to put an end to unfair conduct that harms the market or that harms market participants."

The proposal is based on USDA's extensive administrative case law and builds off of precedent established under other unfair practices laws. The proposal follows well-understood approaches to unfair practices and unfair methods of competition.

The proposed rule will be published in the Federal Register for public comment. Upon publication, the public can submit comments at Regulations.gov for 60 days. All comments submitted will be considered as USDA develops a final rule. The final rule will be published in the Federal Register.

The publication of this proposed rule is part of a suite of USDA regulatory actions under the Packers and Stockyards Act to enhance transparency, stop discrimination, and support market fairness in the livestock and poultry industries. Previous actions include the Poultry Grower Payment Systems and Capital Improvement Systems proposed rule and the Transparency in Poultry Grower Contracting and Tournaments and Inclusive Competition and Market Integrity under the Packers and Stockyards Act final rules.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov).

*Editor's Note: The reason this is reprinted here is that a similar "investigation" is ongoing into "unfair practices" in the seed industry. The National Cattlemen's Beef Association and the Meat Institute have both severely criticized the proposed new rules. Stay tuned.*



**Beyond CRISPR: seekRNA delivers a new pathway for accurate gene editing - Programmable tool can precisely target and relocate genetic sequences**  
University of Sydney

### News Bits

**National condition ratings** for corn and soybeans fell over the past week. That followed a widely mixed week of weather in the Midwest and Plains, including heavy rainfall and flooding in some northern areas and mostly hot, dry weather to the south and east.

The USDA says 69% of the crop is in good to excellent shape, 3% less than last week, with 97% emerged and 4% silking, both ahead of the respective five-year averages.

Patented method developed in the laboratory of Dr Sandro Ataide promises to accelerate the potential of genetic engineering already shown by CRISPR gene-editing technology.

### [See the news here](#)

Scientists at the University of Sydney have developed a gene-editing tool with greater accuracy and flexibility than the industry standard, CRISPR, which has revolutionised genetic engineering in medicine, agriculture and biotechnology.

SeekRNA uses a programmable ribonucleic acid (RNA) strand that can directly identify sites for insertion in genetic sequences, simplifying the editing process and reducing errors.

67% of soybeans are called good to excellent, 3% below a week ago, with 97% planted, 90% emerged, and 8% blooming, all faster than average.

52% of U.S. winter wheat is in good to excellent condition, 3% higher, with 97% headed and 40% harvested, up from the normal rates.

71% of spring wheat is reported as good to excellent, a drop of 5%, with 18% of the crop headed, matching the average.

56% of the cotton crop is said to be good to excellent, a gain of 2%, and 94% is planted, slower than usual, while 30% is squaring and 8% is setting bolls, faster than normal.

83% of cotton is rated good to excellent, unchanged, and 13% has headed, compared to the five-year average of 8%.

61% of sorghum is in good to excellent condition, an increase of 3%, with 90% planted and 17% headed, both close to the typical rates.

47% of U.S. pastures and rangelands are good to excellent, 1% lower.

The USDA's national weekly crop progress and condition reports run through the end of November.

**Source: Renewable Fuels Association news release**

Washington -- On Thursday, June 13, the Foreign Trade Chamber at Brazil's Ministry of the Economy (CAMEX) upheld an 18 percent tariff on U.S. ethanol.

With support from the Brazil Association of Fuel Importers (ABICOM), the U.S. ethanol

The new gene-editing tool is being developed by a team led by **Dr Sandro Ataide** in the School of Life and Environmental Sciences. Their findings have been published in **Nature Communications**.

"We are tremendously excited by the potential for this technology. SeekRNA's ability to target selection with precision and flexibility sets the stage for a new era of genetic engineering, surpassing the limitations of current technologies," Dr Ataide said.

"With CRISPR you need extra components to have a 'cut-and-paste tool', whereas the promise of seekRNA is that it is a stand-alone 'cut-and-paste tool' with higher accuracy that can deliver a wide range of DNA sequences."

CRISPR relies on creating a break in both strands of target DNA, the double-helix genetic code of life, and needs other proteins or the DNA repair machinery to insert the new DNA sequence. This can introduce errors.

Dr Ataide said: "SeekRNA can precisely cleave the target site and insert the new DNA sequence without the use of any other proteins.

"This allows for a much cleaner editing tool with higher accuracy and fewer errors."

Gene-editing has opened completely new areas of research and application since the development of CRISPR more than 10 years ago. It has led to improvements in disease resistance in fruit and crops, reduced the cost and speed of human disease detection, helped in the search for a cure for sickle cell disease and allowed for the development of revolutionary cancer treatment known as (CAR) T-cell therapy.

"We are very much in the early days of what gene editing can do. We hope that by developing this new approach to gene editing, we can contribute to advances in health, agriculture and biotechnology," said joint author **Professor Ruth Hall** from the University of Sydney.

**Precise genetic targeting**

SeekRNA is derived from a family of naturally occurring insertion sequences known as IS1111 and IS110, discovered in bacteria and archaea (cells without a nucleus). Most insertion sequence proteins exhibit little or no target selectivity, however these families exhibit high target specificity.

industry and the U.S. government previously submitted comments advocating for permanent tariff removal during a public consultation period that ended on April 11. Together, the U.S. ethanol industry—including the Renewable Fuels Association, U.S. Grains Council and Growth Energy—reacted to CAMEX's decision with the following statement:

"We remain extremely disappointed with this result and urge CAMEX and the Brazilian government to remove tariff barriers on U.S. ethanol and use this as an opportunity to strengthen the bilateral agenda and stimulate trade cooperation between Brazil and the United States. This tariff has placed a heavy financial burden on Brazilian consumers in a misdirected effort to protect the domestic Brazilian ethanol industry, which enjoys free and increasing access to the U.S. market.

"The U.S. industry remains united in seeking parity with Brazilian exports with reciprocal market access and will seek to take additional measures to rectify this unfair tariff treatment.

"We are committed to striving for fair and balanced trade in ethanol with Brazil."

It is this accuracy that seekRNA has used to achieve its promising results to date. Using the accuracy from this insertion sequence family, seekRNA can be modified to any genomic sequence and insert the new DNA in a precise orientation.

"In the laboratory we have successfully tested seekRNA in bacteria. Our next steps will be to investigate if the technology can be adapted for the more complex **eukaryotic** cells found in humans," Dr Ataide said.

An advantage of the system reported in this study is that it can be applied using only a single protein of modest size plus a short seekRNA strand, to efficiently move genetic cargo. SeekRNA is made up of a small protein of 350 amino acids and an RNA strand of between 70 and 100 nucleotides. A system of this size could be packed into biological nanoscale delivery vehicles (vesicles or lipid nanoparticles) for delivery to cells of interest.

#### Direct insertion to DNA

Another point of differentiation is this technology's ability to insert DNA sequences in the desired location by itself, a feat not possible with many current editing tools.

"Current CRISPR technology has limitations on the size of genetic sequences that can be introduced," said University of Sydney research associate **Rezwan Siddiquee**, lead author of the paper. "This restricts the scope of application." Globally, other teams are pursuing similar research into the gene-editing potential of the IS1111 and IS110 family. However, Dr Ataide says they only have shown results for one member of the IS110 family and rely on a much larger RNA version. The team at Sydney is advancing its technique through direct laboratory sampling and application of the shorter seekRNA itself.

#### Research

Siddiquee, R. et. al. 'A programmable seekRNA guide target selection by IS1111 and IS110 type insertion sequences'. (**Nature Communications**) DOI: 10.1038/s41467-024-49474-9

#### Declaration

Dr Sandro Ataide, Professor Ruth Hall and Rezwan Siddiquee are inventors of patent applications related to this work. Research was supported by the University of Sydney Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) Strategic Research Impact Fund and a

National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Investigator grant.

## Council pushes for tougher stance on farmer seed swaps in new EU law

By [Sofia Sanchez Manzanaro](#) | [Euractiv](#)

EU member states are in favour of stricter rules on marketing seeds and other plant reproductive material (PRM), especially concerning exchanges between farmers.

On June 18, the Council published the **current state of discussions** on the draft legislation, which aims to replace at least 11 directives governing the production and marketing of PRM, such as seeds, cuttings, tubers, and young plants.

At the next meeting of EU agriculture ministers, on 24 June in Luxembourg, the Belgian Council presidency will present the document publicly. The text reveals that EU countries are pushing for a tougher stance on farmer exchanges of reproductive material, a contentious aspect of the regulation.

The European Commission's proposal exempts seed exchanges among farmers from regulatory requirements and bureaucracy if these do not involve payment.

However, several national delegations in the Council have proposed deleting this exemption entirely, fearing it would create a loophole for a seed black market.

Other delegations suggest keeping the exemption but tightening the definitions of "farmers" and "local level."

Meanwhile, the European Parliament's position has been more flexible, even including the possibility of agricultural producers being remunerated for exchanges of their own PRM—and not only seeds—going beyond the Commission's proposal, which only allows seed swaps in kind.

According to the text approved by the Parliament, the Commission will later decide the maximum amount of PRM that can be traded among farmers without being subject to the rules.

Another proposed exemption to the marketing rules is the case of conservation varieties – traditional crops adapted to local conditions that risk being displaced by modern varieties.



Some EU countries suggest narrowing this measure to include only “old” conservation varieties, excluding “newly bred” ones that are also adapted to local conditions.

However, the Council presidency warned that excluding new varieties created by farmer communities would subject them to all provisions that apply to commercial crops.

The Parliament, on the other hand, advocates for less rules for the access, sale, and transfer of genetic resources by conservation organisations in “small quantities”—500 grams for vegetables or up to 1000 kilograms for seed potatoes.

Herbert Dorfmann, the member of the European Parliament (MEP) leading the work on the file, emphasised that networks involved in conservation should not be burdened with excessive bureaucracy as their efforts contribute to the EU’s biodiversity and cultural richness.

These proposed flexibilities have been criticised by Euroseeds, the European seed industry lobby. In April, the organisation warned that the “many derogations and exemptions” jeopardise the quality and control of seed material in Europe.

Conversely, the European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC), representing peasants and small-scale farmers, argues that any restrictions on farmer exchanges of seed material violate producers’ rights to swap PRM from their harvest, as stated in a [2018 UN declaration](#).

## Factoids

**Euroseeds** condemns the destruction of Italy’s first open field trial of gene-edited rice by vandals on June 21 in northern Italy. This trial was crucial for testing the resistance of the rice, named ‘RIS8imo,’ against fungal diseases, representing a significant advance in sustainable agriculture.

RIS8imo, developed using CRISPR technology, aimed to reduce the need for fungicides through targeted mutations. Previous lab results showed promising disease resistance.

Garlich von Essen, Secretary General & CEO of Euroseeds, criticized the vandalism as a criminal act against science and public order, highlighting its detrimental impact on plant research and the development of improved crop varieties.

Led by Vittoria Brambilla's team at the University of Milan, this trial was the first authorized under a 2023 law that streamlined procedures for gene-edited plant trials. Euroseeds calls for swift action to support researchers and prevent future incidents, emphasizing the need to respect the freedom to conduct lawful research.

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