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Rollins: USDA downsizing plan due in May, could include some consolidation

The Trump administration's plan for reorganizing and downsizing USDA should be out by the middle of May, and it will likely call for consolidating some programs with other agencies, according to Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins.

During an interview with *Agri-Pulse* on Tuesday after a series of events in the Fargo, North Dakota, region, Rollins indicated some aspects of USDA Rural Development could be among functions of the department that get moved elsewhere.

"There's seven agencies that deal with housing, including USDA," she said. "There are 12 agencies that deal with rural prosperity and rural programming, and not that some of that won't remain, but this is the first time maybe that our country is taking a really hard look at how we organize our government."


Ag Secretary Brooke Rollins with Sen. John Hoeven, R-N.D., near Fargo, North Dakota. (Noah Wicks photo)

Rollins also suggested federal firefighting services could be consolidating. Major land management agencies are largely split between USDA and Interior. The Forest Service is part of USDA, while the Bureau of Land Management is under Interior.

"Maybe we keep ours, they keep theirs, but we've got to be more effective and efficient in how we fight the wildfires and how we build our firefighters, how we train them. And there's a better way to do it than the way that we're doing it," Rollins said.

She stressed that the reorganization was intended to make government services more efficient.

"We're not taking a look at, 'Are we going to take food away from hungry kids' or, 'Are we going to stop fighting those wildfires' — but looking at all of those layers of bureaucracy to make sure we're doing it in the most efficient and effective way possible with the taxpayer dollars," she said.

USDA is finalizing a second round of buyouts and has been expected to announce more layoffs as part of the downsizing.

"The ultimate planning and reorganization should be finished in terms of at least the announcement by early to mid-May. So, we're getting really close to sort of the final plans," Rollins told reporters at a stop earlier Tuesday.

Rollins told *Agri-Pulse* she wasn't ready to announce how many employees had been allowed to take the buyouts because some of the applications were being turned down. For example, she said applications from Farm Service Agency field staff had been declined.

"It's a bit of a moving target, because some of them … we pull back," she said.

She said the four years Trump was out of office allowed his advisers to plan the government downsizing.

"The four years in between term one and term two allowed a lot of work to be done to really be much more intentional on how we do just that, how we right-size the federal government, across every single agency," Rollins told reporters.

The downsizing has already been significant, with news outlets including *Agri-Pulse* reporting the loss of well over 10% of employees at the agency of approximately 100,000 employees.

Kevin Shea, former administrator of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, told *Agri-Pulse* Monday that "well over" 1,000 people at APHIS are leaving the agency, and that the loss in personnel is approaching "20% of the workforce."

In the Plant Protection and Quarantine area alone, 700 to 800 people out of approximately 3,000 will no longer be on the job — about a quarter of the workforce.

The Agricultural Research Service lost well over 1,000 employees in the latest buyout, which follows about 800 employees leaving through the first one. That's out of an organization of about 7,000 people, according to the agency's website.

Trump's trade war hasn't hit farmers yet; real pain could take months

When President Donald Trump launched his first trade war with China in 2018, the impact was swift. Soybean prices plunged from $10.21 a bushel that June 1 to $8.34 by July 13. USDA, within days, announced a $12 billion compensation plan for farmers.

This time, Trump and China have imposed even higher tariffs on each other, but with little or no impact on prices of soybeans, cotton and other commodities that are heavily exported to China.

Economists say the impact on U.S. farmers is coming but may not be felt until fall, giving Trump officials more time to reach some kind of deal with China to lower or remove the latest tariffs.

(USDA photo)

Even then, farmers who've bought revenue insurance will be protected to some extent against a price decline this year. Soybeans could be insured this year at $10.54 a bushel, a few cents above where soybean futures have been trading this week.

Prices for commodities such as cotton, sorghum and wheat also are close to the levels where they were when Trump took office in January.

Economists say there's still a lot of uncertainty in the industry about how long tariffs will stay in place, and that's serving to keep prices relatively steady.

"We've seen these tariffs get announced and two days later get suspended," said Joe Glauber, a former chief economist at USDA.

Scott Gerlt, chief economist for the American Soybean Association, said, "My guess is that the traders think there's some probability of this getting resolved, and so that's what's going on."

In fact, Bloomberg reported that Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said at a closed-door investors summit Tuesday that the situation is unsustainable and likely to de-escalate even though negotiations haven't started.

Meanwhile, Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins reaffirmed during a stop in Fargo, North Dakota, Tuesday that the administration would provide farmers with compensation if there are what she described as "longer-term repercussions" from retaliatory tariffs.

Another factor behind the lack of market reaction to the tariffs: China has rushed into the market in recent weeks to buy up Brazilian soybeans, said Dan Basse, president of AgResource Co.

"China has just bought the table, to use a term poker term, down in Brazil, and now they are in a different mindset," Basse said.

The Chinese are clearly assessing that American soybeans may be too expensive for their tastes this fall when the U.S. crop hits the market, according to Basse. China bought about 70 cargoes of soybeans the week before last.

Dan Basse (LinkedIn photo)

"They're now looking at the hole that would be U.S. exports, probably from the middle of September through the end of December, maybe middle of January, and they're trying to find, you know, 'Can I go out there and buy enough Brazilian soybeans to get enough supply around me so that when I get to that hole, I'm not paying 145% tariffs,'" he said.

AgResource estimates China will import at least 14 million metric tons of soybeans in April and May — almost all of that from Brazil — compared to less than 4 million tons in March and well above the pace of imports this time last year. China imported about 10 million tons last May and under 9 million in April 2024.

Another factor holding up commodity prices is that Trump didn't raise tariffs on Mexico and Canada, the two biggest markets for U.S. ag commodities, Basse said.

Still, a new analysis by Glauber and colleagues at the International Food Policy Research Institute estimates that the trade war with China, if it continues, will reduce soybean prices by 11% and cut U.S. oilseed exports by 39%.

The projected impact is in line with estimates from the American Soybean Association and the National Corn Growers Association last October, just before the election. The groups said that a 60% tariff on U.S. commodities would cut the price of U.S. soybeans by nearly $1 a bushel and cut the corn price by 13 cents a bushel, while raising prices for farmers in Argentina and Brazil.

Trump's new "125% tariff would likely have large impacts on global oilseed trade flows. … It would make U.S. soybean imports prohibitively expensive for China — reducing them to near zero," the analysis says. Chinese demand would raise prices paid to suppliers in Brazil and Argentina while lowering them for U.S. producers, the analysis adds.

The analysis also notes that China has drastically increased dependence on Brazilian soybeans over the years, providing some insulation from Trump's tariffs. Brazil's share of the Chinese soybean market grew to 45% by 2016 and then jumped to 75% in 2018 as Trump's first trade war kicked in.

Brazil still accounts for 71% of the Chinese market, compared to the U.S. share of 21%, which is down from 40% in 2016.

If there's a bright side for U.S. farmers, it may be the timing of the tariffs, assuming they eventually come down.

"The reality is that we're entering into a part of the part of the season where we don't export a lot of U.S. soy," said ASA's Gerlt.

It "gives us a little bit more time. If this were occurring late fall, we would have very immediate, very fast, dramatic impacts. But we're at the time of year where this has less effect," he said.

Former 'climate-smart' projects seeking guidance to reapply

Leaders of projects funded under USDA's canceled-and-rebranded Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities program are waiting for more guidance on how to reapply after the Trump administration labeled the program a "slush fund" and apparently terminated most of its grants.

A requirement in the newly named Advancing Markets for Producers initiative that 65% of federal dollars go directly to farmers could mean less money for technical assistance and carbon measurement and verification, according to conversations with participants and observers.

In order to qualify for AMP, termination letters said projects must meet "Farmer First policy priorities," which include having enrolled and paid at least one producer by Dec. 31, 2024.

The deadline to reapply is June 20.

Project leaders said they received an email April 17 from Colton Buckley, chief of staff at USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, promising a "frequently asked questions" statement and sessions for stakeholders on how to reapply.

Buckley and USDA communications staff did not respond to questions about how many projects had been terminated and when participants could expect more information.


AgriCapture climate-friendly rice. The company's project was one of the ones that survived the recent reconfiguring of the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities program (AgriCapture photo)

The program funded with $3.03 billion from the Commodity Credit Corp. involved 135 projects and covered an array of agricultural production practices to create a market for "climate-smart" commodities. Private funding accounted for another $1 billion.

Project leaders contacted by *Agri-Pulse* largely say they want to reapply but need more details. They worry that significant delays in getting reapproved could hamper program effectiveness.

"We're certainly interested, and we want it to work out, but we just don't know enough to say whether or not it's going to be a good fit for the type of work that we want to do," said Jon White, climate smart project director for Working Landscapes, a North Carolina nonprofit organization that works to incentivize small-scale farmers growing for local food hubs.

He said he needs more clarity on what would qualify as a payment to farmers, citing the purchase of shared equipment. "I think that it's a hard line to draw, but the administration is drawing a line, and so I think we will do our best to adapt our project to meet that line," he said.

White said he's encouraged by the administration's emphasis on market development but is concerned about how long it would take to get reapproved.

The June 20 reapplication deadline "is over two months from now, and who knows how long it would [take] to actually award these grants and get us started?" he said. In addition, he worries that thousands of people working on projects nationwide "will likely have moved on by then."

Complicating matters is that the funding freeze means White and his staff aren't being paid. In its announcement April 14, USDA said it would cover all disbursements from before April 13.

White organized a letter to Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins last month from more than 100 project participants, most of them smaller scale, seeking to discuss how to keep the program going. He said an informal survey of 34 smaller projects showed that only one met USDA's criteria to continue. The rest had grants terminated with an opportunity to reapply.

Based on a *Agri-Pulse* analysis of 82 PCSC projects with $5 million or more in overall funding, only 19 would have met the requirement to provide at least 65% of federal funds to producers. Two of the 82 did not include information on total producer incentives and the remaining 61 did not appear to meet the threshold, based on the contract agreements.

Information about the program was taken down from the USDA website as part of a Trump administration scrub of climate-related information.

Former NRCS Director Bruce Knight told *Agri-Pulse* he thinks it's possible that fewer than a dozen projects meet the USDA's minimum for direct AMP payments. He said some projects were using private funds to pay farmers.

One project that is making the cut is AgriCapture's climate-friendly rice program.

The Tennessee-based company said it had not only met but exceeded all three criteria. "Since its launch in 2023, the program has developed two distinct markets for U.S. rice farmers and distributed over $4 million in incentives to 33 rice farmers across 42,000 acres, channeling 74% of USDA funds directly to producers," the company said in a news release April 16.

Rivka Hodgkinson (LinkedIn photo)

When will new program be up and running?

With farmers beginning field work, some question whether the timeline for the updated program will extend into next year.

"It's always challenging to make repairs on the car while it's driving down the road," said Rivka Hodgkinson, executive director of the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts, which has a project that does not qualify for AMP.

"It's not an ideal timeline," Lisa Woodke, sustainability director for [Star of the West Milling Co. in Michigan], said. "When the announcement came in January, had they just terminated all of us, we would have had several months to get ready for this spring season and we probably could have figured it out and we could be enrolling growers right now."

Hodgkinson said she was "very thankful" that the program is proceeding. But she said the 65% number could require organizations to take project money from technical assistance or soil sampling, potentially forcing producers to take on some of those costs.

"I think it's very easy to look at the surface level, and for people to be like, 'Oh, this means more money is going to producers. That's good, right?'" Hodgkinson said. "But there is a whole lot of support being removed from them at the same time."

Hodgkinson said her association is looking at reapplying but is waiting for more guidance.

Woodke said her group's project is "very close" to meeting the 65% minimum, though she will need to shift some funding around. Star of the West, the ninth-largest miller in the country, will reapply for AMP once USDA provides more information.

While "change is never comfortable," Woodke said she thinks 65% is an acceptable number for the amount of federal funding that should go to growers.

"I don't have any problems with that," she said. "Had we been given that direction with the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities grant, we would have followed that."

Woodke added, however, that she does have concerns about AMP timing. Farmers are in the early stages of planting, which means they have made important conservation decisions for the year. While farmers who have already decided to plant cover crops or use a no-till system this year may be able to get funding if the program were to be reapproved later this year, others may have to wait until next year.

Silvia Secchi, a professor at the University of Iowa, said several projects were using payments in kind or giving farmers the tools to implement practices, but not necessarily delivering payments.

She said projects with greater emphasis on science or measuring, monitoring, reporting and verification are likely to struggle adjusting to meet the new requirement. That would hit universities that were doing extension work with farmers particularly hard.

"It would really require them to restart from scratch in the middle of it," Secchi said. "You can't just midstream kind of pick up and completely alter direction. It creates a lot of chaos."

Initiatives like PCSC must be in place for a long time for a market to develop, Secchi said. And efforts to create marketplaces have to go beyond farmer incentives but help the supply chain.

More broadly, Secchi said she's concerned how the changes to PCSC and other action by the administration will affect U.S. agriculture's global competitiveness. Outside the U.S., she said, there's more buy-in from consumers regarding climate and the food system. Scaling back support for building climate certification schemes for multiple commodities will hurt efforts to export those goods in the future, she said.

Lisa Woodke (LinkedIn photo)

Less red tape a good thing, grain miller says

Rollins' emphasis on reducing paperwork resonated with at least one grant coordinator, Jessica Whitaker Allen of Whitaker Grain in Arkansas. She said she quickly reapplied for a project she's involved in, testing a water-saving technique in rice called alternate wetting and drying, or AWD.

She said she has doubled the number of producers in the program from 12 to 24 and shifted funding for specialized equipment to verify methane reductions from AWD into producer incentives to meet the 65% threshold.

"It does look like they're trying to cut out a lot of this red tape, and a lot of this paperwork that we were really getting bogged down with originally, to get this money out the door as quickly as possible," she said.

A closed footpath as part of U.K. government efforts to combat foot-and-mouth disease (Neil Crosby photo)

She acknowledged that her project is unique in that it was just approved in December and has had no expenses. "We haven't spent $1 yet, so we're actually in a really good spot," she said.

Nevertheless, "there's a lot of things that haven't been addressed," she said, such as a Biden administration requirement that 40% of project benefits go to historically underserved producers.

"I asked directly [about the 40% requirement], didn't get an answer, so we submitted with the information that we had been given thus far, and we're going to wait to see," she said.

Europe's foot-and-mouth outbreak spurs anxiety for US exports

Foot-and-mouth disease in Europe has the U.S. pork and beef sectors on edge as any U.S. cases could dent exports and batter farm revenue. In addition, trade barriers in international markets have blunted any short-term export opportunities the outbreak may have held for U.S. producers.

On Thursday, Hungary confirmed its fifth FMD outbreak at a cattle farm near the Slovakian border. Four other farms had confirmed cases, leading to culling more than 4,000 animals.

Hungary's outbreak is the latest in a spate of detections on the continent since the beginning of 2025. Slovakia has confirmed six infection sites since March. Germany had an isolated outbreak in water buffalo in January — its first case since 1988 — but has since regained FMD-free status.

The outbreaks "are really concerning," Megan Niederwerder, executive director of the Iowa-based Swine Health Information Center, told *Agri-Pulse*. The affected countries had been FMD-free for decades, she said, and it's not immediately clear what caused the reintroduction.

"What changed?" Niederwerder asked. "Does the U.S. have that same risk?"

The fast-spreading virus affects cloven-hoof animals, causing fever and blisters on the mouth and feet. While the virus doesn't typically kill the animals and cannot spread to humans, it reduces milk and meat production. Culling to prevent its spread can wreak economic havoc.

"It's very contagious, highly transmissible, and the virus is very stable in the environment," Niederwerder said — a dangerous combination that allows it to survive on surfaces, like the bottom of a shoe, or in contaminated animal products, and reach new populations. Accordingly, countries move quickly to limit imports from affected regions to limit transmission.

The last time Europe had a major foot-and-mouth outbreak, in 2001, the United Kingdom had to slaughter around 6 million animals to contain it, and U.K. agriculture lost an estimated 20% of its total revenue, according to the [U.K. Department for Environment.]()

The U.S., which has not had an FMD case since 1929, limited imports from the U.K. in 2001 and was able to avoid an outbreak. The episode prompted U.S. policymakers and livestock producers to evaluate biosecurity practices and implement more stringent protocols, Barb Determan, who was then president of the National Pork Producers Council, told *Agri-Pulse*.

"It started the conversation about biosecurity," Determan said. "We had to quickly look and see what our biosecurity practices were."

Biosecurity is now entrenched in the vocabulary of U.S. farm country, and disease prevention practices are common. But while defenses have strengthened, risks have also multiplied, as more integrated global supply chains increase opportunities for trans-Atlantic disease transmission.

"Our world is even more connected than it was then with global travel and movement of products," Niederwerder said.

The stakes for the U.S. are also much higher today than they were in 2001, Determan said. In the early 2000s, the U.S. was transitioning from a net importer of pork in the 1990s, to a net exporter. Exports made up a smaller share of industry profits.

Today, however, exports make up around 30% of U.S. pork producer revenue and any curbs on exports from an FMD outbreak on U.S. soil would incur steep revenue losses.

"If suddenly we couldn't export, we'd be in real trouble," said Determan, who is now president of Heartland Marketing Group, a communications firm.

Trade opportunities have been blunted by barriers

Countries have moved swiftly to restrict imports from affected countries since the outbreak began. Inspection at land borders caused traffic congestion in Slovakia, and industry groups in Hungary are warning that the country's 12,000 tons of annual pork exports are in jeopardy.

For the U.S. beef industry, the outbreak offers few trade opportunities for U.S. producers, according to R-CALF CEO Bill Bullard. Countries like Brazil, Australia and New Zealand overproduce for their domestic markets and are better positioned to step in and fill any supply shortfall that may arise, he argued.

But for the U.S. pork sector, the episode highlights the trade barriers they argue their exporters face in international markets.

Germany provides the bulk of the U.K.'s pork, for example. The U.S. could have stepped in to fill the temporary hole left by Germany had it not been for a slew of tariff and nontariff barriers, Erin Borror, vice president for economic analysis at the U.S. Meat Export Federation, said.

The U.K. continued to follow the European Union's live animal process and plant approval requirements after leaving the EU, banning hormone growth promoters and certain beta-agonists and pathogen reduction treatments permitted in the U.S.

"These obstacles prevented the U.S. from even taking advantage of a short-term opportunity," Borror said. Germany regained most of its access to the U.K. last month when the U.K. agreed to narrow import restrictions to cover only products originating near the infection site.

Instead, other European and South American countries have likely benefitted from any temporary trade disruption, analysts said.

Maria Zieba (LinkedIn photo)

As with Germany's recent bout of African swine fever, following the FMD outbreak, German exports bound for international markets were diverted to the internal EU market — in which countries only curb imports from affected areas, not whole countries. With more German products in their domestic market, Spanish producers have been able to turn their attention overseas, Maria Zieba, vice president of government affairs at the NPPC, told *Agri-Pulse*.

Spain has also positioned itself to expand its pork exports to China, after agreeing on new protocols with Beijing to allow the export of a wider range of products.

In South Korea, for example, Germany was a major provider of single-ribbed bellies. Spain, the Netherlands, Austria, France and Chile are set to fill that gap, Borror said. The U.S. is not a major exporter of single-ribbed bellies, she added, because high domestic demand for bacon keeps prices higher than international competitors.

In the event of a protracted outbreak affecting multiple European countries, Zieba said, ongoing U.S. trade tensions could also limit exporters' opportunities. The EU provides around half of China's pork imports, for example. But prohibitively high tariffs on U.S. products and an ongoing trade conflict would prevent U.S. exporters from capturing any new trade opportunities.

"You would see Brazil continuing to take market share in areas like China," Zieba said, adding, "We have political and economic issues that are that are affecting the ability for many of our meat trade to be exported."

Shifting FDA food safety inspection to states has big challenges

After years of discussion, the Food and Drug Administration may shift responsibility for routine food safety inspection to the states. While industry and food safety experts say it's a logical move, there are notable outstanding questions about how to execute such a change.

In a leaked version of the Trump administration's budget priorities for the Department of Health and Human Services, one provision calls for eliminating FDA's role in routine food facility inspection. Instead, it suggests expanding state contracts to provide all inspection.

There have been discussions about such a delegation for years but even those close to the matter were surprised to see the provision included in the Office of Management and Budget document.

"For it to move suddenly to announcement stage, it was very surprising, and it would seem to indicate that there's still a lot of details that need to be ironed out," said Brian Ronholm, director of food policy at Consumer Reports and a former USDA food safety official.

Oregon Department of Agriculture food safety inspector (Flickr photo)

Steve Mandernach, executive director of the Association of Food and Drug Officials, called it a "logical next step. I think you have to take it seriously."

He said shifting inspections to the states would be in line with other Trump administration actions to outsource federal agency work.

Mandernach said there's been apprehension about giving states more responsibility in a national food safety system. But many states are completing inspections considered equivalent to FDA's.

Most states already conduct at least some food safety inspections on behalf of FDA through cooperative agreements. FDA relies on states for 50% of food manufacturer inspection, 70% of animal food inspection and 90% of produce inspection. Retail, restaurant and grocery inspection are state responsibility.

States can conduct inspection at lower cost than federal inspectors, in part because state inspectors have less distance to travel. State inspectors also can visit facilities more often and are more likely to build closer relationships with companies.

State inspection of produce safety has worked well, Mandernach believes.

The move would make food inspection similar to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, where states oversee most day-to-day work with federal funding and technical support

Questions about details remain

One question is about expertise. FDA inspectors are typically trained to do multiple kinds of inspections from medical devices, pharmaceutical plants and all things under FDA's jurisdiction.

While it needs to be specified that nonfood inspection would remain at the federal level, having states handle all food inspection could offer potentially increased expertise, Ronholm said.

Roberta Wagner, senior vice president of regulatory and scientific affairs at the International Dairy Foods Association, said FDA in the past has discussed focusing on foreign food facility inspections while leaving domestic food facilities to states. FDA would then play an oversight role and train inspectors. She compared this to the National Conference of Interstate Milk Shippers, where FDA certifies inspectors and conducts routine audits. Wagner added that in recent conversations with FDA, leaders have made clear they want to do more on food safety, not less.

She said one of the biggest gaps now is having enough trained inspectors. States and federal agencies struggle to recruit and retain inspectors.

Wagner said companies want FDA's stamp of approval on food safety programs. But she said the agency has struggled to achieve benchmarks in the Food Safety Modernization Act.

The agency has not met mandated targets for domestic and international food safety inspections since 2018, according to a Government Accountability Office report released earlier this year.

Wagner suggested responsibilities could be split where FDA reviews and approves food safety programs while state inspectors ensure those programs are being implemented.

Shifting inspection responsibility to states cannot happen in a vacuum, Mandernach said, but needs to include management of inventory inspections, consumer complaints and recalls.

Ronholm said one big concern would be the potentially inconsistent quality of state programs.

Brian Ronholm (Consumer Reports photo)

"When it comes to food safety inspections, some states are very, very strong," Ronholm said. "But others, it's pretty much a skeleton program. So that would be an area of concern, is what will be going on in those states, especially if there is a significant presence of food manufacturing in that state, where there is a big need for a robust program, and it doesn't exist."

Even with responsibilities shifted to states, Ronholm said robust federal oversight would be necessary. Recent staffing cuts could interfere with that oversight, he said.

Adequate funding and trust between states and the FDA are also potential challenges.

Starting in the last administration, FDA began warning states to prepare for a cut in the funds they've received for about 10 years. The loss was estimated at an effective $34 million a year.

As the consequences of those cuts have begun to take shape, states are preparing for cuts between 40 to 60% in FDA cooperative agreements.

As a result, some states are considering cutting staff. Others are considering whether they can afford to continue some food safety programs in the wake of the cuts, says one industry source.

If FDA does plan to shift more responsibility to the states, they need to put out those details soon, the source said.

Wagner said states must conduct quality inspection and hire and train the right people. "There's got to be money," Wagner said. "If you do it right, I don't see it saving money."

EPA weighs petition to curb pesticide labeling litigation, preempt state rules

The Environmental Protection Agency is evaluating whether to enact new rules declaring pesticides misbranded if they include any warnings based on information not included in the agency's risk assessments.

The agency is weighing a petition submitted by 11 state attorneys general that aims to reduce failure-to-warn litigation against pesticide companies in state courts and preempt state-level labeling requirements states may seek to implement.

The petition seeks new rules under the Federal Insecticide, Rodenticide and Fungicide Act that would deem pesticides misbranded if they were to include risk of cancer, birth defect or reproductive harm warnings inconsistent with EPA's human health risk assessments, which are generally conducted every 15 years.

Bill Jordan (American University photo)

In the petition, the attorneys general specifically listed protecting glyphosate as one of their goals. Bayer, which uses glyphosate as the active ingredient in Roundup, is fighting thousands of failure-to-warn lawsuits that have been filed in federal and state courts.

"What's really going on here with the petition is an attempt to get EPA to write a regulation that would eliminate the kinds of lawsuits that are going on with Roundup," said Bill Jordan, a former deputy director for programs in EPA's Office of Pesticide Programs.

About 114,000 Roundup cases have either been settled or are "not eligible for various reasons" as of Jan. 31, according to Bayer's 2024 annual report, leaving about 67,000 in the wings. Many plaintiffs have filed in Missouri. The company spent about $10 billion to settle about 100,000 of those claims and has set aside $5.9 billion for future cases.

Twenty-seven Roundup trials had concluded in federal and state courts in California, Missouri, Oregon, Arkansas, Delaware, Illinois and Pennsylvania as of Jan. 31, Bayer's report said. It added that it reached "favorable outcomes" in 17 of those, while plaintiffs were awarded compensatory and, in some cases, punitive damages in the other 10.

Bayer and a coalition of more than 90 farm groups supportive of glyphosate have been pushing state legislatures to enact bills making FIFRA labels sufficient to satisfy warning requirements under civil tort law. One such measure was approved by both chambers of Georgia's state legislature last month and now awaits Gov. Brian Kemp's signature.

Bayer attorneys have consistently argued that FIFRA preempts state-based failure-to-warn claims. While that argument was rebuffed by judges in the 9th and 11th circuits, it found favor with those in the 3rd Circuit, creating a split that could make it easier for Bayer to persuade the Supreme Court to take up the appeal.

The company filed a petition with that court April 4 seeking review of a decision from the Missouri Court of Appeals.

Bayer also submitted a comment in support of the AGs' petition, which claimed that some courts "have misinterpreted the relative law and regulatory framework, leading to non-uniformity of labeling in direct contravention of Congress's intent." Bayer's glyphosate products account for approximately 40% of the global market and U.S. farmers would likely need to either turn to foreign sources of the product or grow less if that access was cut off, the comment said.

"As the petitioners note, the ambiguity created by some states and courts — through an interpretation of FIFRA that its plain language does not support — will undermine farmer access to herbicides such as glyphosate," Bayer's comment said.

But Lori Andrus, president of the American Association for Justice, argued in a comment that the proposed petition "would remove decades of precedent and a vital safety net in protecting the public from misbranded pesticides." She added that while Congress has made it clear that while all pesticides must be registered with the EPA, "this power does not extend to pre-empting state laws that are consistent with the EPA's authority."

In an emailed statement to *Agri-Pulse*, Andrus said the proposal laid out in the petition "would strip basic safety protections from farm families across over 16,000 EPA-registered chemicals by giving total legal immunity to companies if their products cause cancer, Parkinson's disease, infertility or developmental harm to our families or children."

Andrus contends EPA does not have the legal authority to grant the petition but added that if the agency were to enact a rule like the petition requests, "pesticide companies would immediately move to dismiss tens of thousands of cases filed against them by farm families."


Leah Nicholls (Public Justice photo)

However, the agriculture commissioners of 12 states argued in a comment that "the lack of clarity in the court system has only increased regulatory uncertainty" since the petition was first filed last August. They said that the 3rd Circuit Court of Appeals ruled last August that state-based failure-to-warn claims are expressly preempted by FIFRA, while trial courts in Pennsylvania, Missouri and Illinois have issued contradictory rulings.

"The patchwork of legal rulings disrupts the agricultural sector and has created massive uncertainty for farmers," the agricultural commissioners said. They advocated for EPA to "reaffirm its authority to make pesticide findings and decisions under FIFRA."

Leah Nicholls, the director of the Access to Justice Project at Public Justice, wrote in opposition to the petition, arguing that Congress "intended state law to complement federal regulation."

"In short, state tort suits — which have long been brought against pesticide manufacturers based on improper labeling — further the objectives of FIFRA to keep pesticide labels accurate, up to date, and sufficiently protective of health," Nicholls wrote in a comment. "Congress was well aware of the prevalence of state tort suits in this area and embraced rather than displaced them."

In addition to protecting glyphosate, the state attorneys general who submitted the petition also said they were seeking the rule change to preempt warning requirements enacted by states. California's Proposition 65, for instance, previously required a label warning of glyphosate's potential as a human carcinogen, but the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals found in 2023 that the warning violated the plaintiffs' First Amendment right to be free from compelled speech.

While California's enforcement of Proposition 65 on glyphosate products was enjoined by the court, "the threat of labeling rules that differ by state, common-law failure-to-warn claims, and future, needless litigation continues," wrote the petitioners, who include the attorneys general for Nebraska, Iowa, Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Montana, North Dakota, South Carolina and South Dakota.

In a comment supporting the petition, 296 state and federal agricultural groups said if states were to seek to impose pesticide health claims on labels that went against EPA findings, it would place manufacturers "in a no-win situation — either do not comply with a state requirement or comply with the state requirement and include language on a pesticide package that is false and misleading."

The groups included the American Soybean Association, the National Corn Growers Association, the American Seed Trade Association, the U.S. Peanut Federation, USA Rice and the American Farm Bureau Federation.

News Briefs:

Administration sees 'significant progress' in US-India trade talks

U.S. Vice President JD Vance and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi touted progress in discussions on a U.S.-India trade deal during Vance's visit to New Delhi this week.

The vice president said in a statement that the two countries have made "significant progress" and have agreed to a roadmap and terms of reference for future discussions. The U.S. wants to use the negotiations to grow market access by lowering trade barriers and tariffs, according to a fact sheet from the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative on the terms of reference.

Notably, the Indian readout of the meeting cited ongoing efforts, but did not say the two sides had agreed on terms of reference for the negotiations.

U.S. Vice President JD Vance talks with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a meeting in New Delhi, India, Monday, April 21, 2025. (Indian Prime Minister's Office via AP)

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt called agreement on the terms of reference “a big deal,” describing it in briefing reporters Tuesday as “a framework to move the ball forward.”

Former U.S. trade negotiator Wendy Cutler pointed out that it has been nine weeks since the U.S. and India said they would start talks on a trade deal. Cutler suggested that if it takes nine weeks to reach an acceptable path on negotiations with a single country, the administration could struggle to conclude the dozens of deals under negotiation before the end of President Donald Trump’s 90-day pause on country-specific reciprocal tariffs.

“Only 12 weeks allotted to conclude trade talks with multiple countries,” Cutler, who is now vice president at the Washington-based Asia Society Policy Institute, posted on LinkedIn. “Meaningful trade agreements take time to negotiate to get them right and ensure that they are meaningful and durable,” she wrote.

Leavitt told reporters in Tuesday’s briefing that U.S. officials are meeting with representatives from 34 countries this week to continue to hash out deals.

Economists see 'government payment trap'

Government farm payments have served to increase ag production costs, including cropland values, even as producers have made less on their crops, according to an analysis by economists and farm policy experts at The Ohio State University and the University of Illinois.

Row crop producers lost a net $32 billion in private market returns from 2014 to 2023, while receiving federal safety net payments totaling $120 billion, according to the analysis. Meanwhile, cropland prices increased from an average of $3,580 in 2012-13 to $5,445 in 2023-24. Land rents went from $131 to $158 an acre.

Providing farmers with additional payments is “unlikely to relieve the crop cost-price squeeze but instead raise the cost of producing crops. In short, U.S. crop agriculture confronts a government payment trap,” the authors say.

USDA releases $341M in disaster aid

USDA is providing $340.6 million in disaster aid to rural communities and producers harmed by hurricanes and other natural disasters.

Communities in North Carolina will receive $25 million and communities in Tennessee will get $18 million for damages by hurricanes since 2022. Some $20 million of the total will go for restoration of drinking water, wastewater and electric infrastructure.

North Dakota will receive more than $5 million to help rebuild electric infrastructure, following severe storms and wildfires.

Egg-cellent day at the White House Easter Egg Roll

The "Super Bowl of eggs" is how Ag Secretary Brooke Rollins described this year's annual White House Easter Egg Roll to *Agri-Pulse*. More than 30,000 real American eggs were donated and hand-dyed by farmers for this year's festivities.

Agriculture was on full display at the American Egg Board's Hen to Home exhibit, which took attendees from the soybeans used as hen feed to a carton of eggs. Ohio farmer and United Soybean Board Past Chair Steve Reinhard grew the soybeans. The International Fresh Produce Association's booth allowed attendees to snack on carrots and arrange fresh-cut flowers.

Farm Hands on the Potomac: Barncastle to lead Family Farm Alliance

Samantha Barncastle (Family Farm Alliance photo)

The Family Farm Alliance named **Samantha Barncastle** executive director effective Nov. 1. The New Mexico farmer and attorney has 17 years of experience in water and natural resources policy and litigation at the state and federal levels. She worked at two water law firms in Las Cruces, New Mexico, before launching her own practice, Barncastle Law Firm, in 2014. “I hope to work with other industries and interests to preserve our Western way of life, while also economically and safely feeding America,” Barncastle said in a statement. She will begin transitioning into the new role in August before assuming full responsibilities after current Executive Director **Dan Keppen** steps down after the 2025 annual conference in Reno, Nevada.

The House Agriculture Committee Republican staff hired **Josh Stull** as a professional staff member covering rural development and energy. He was stakeholder affairs officer at the National Institute of Food and Agriculture. He also was vice president for policy and analysis at the Supporters of Agricultural Research Foundation.

Rep. Salud Carbajal, D-Calif., hired **Eduardo Carrizosa** as communications director. He was press secretary in the office of Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn. **Kaitlyn Heddinger** was promoted to digital director/press secretary. She has been with Klobuchar since 2023.

House Ag Committee member Rep. Frank Lucas, R-Okla., hired **Daniel Dziadon** as deputy chief of staff. He was Republican staff director for the House Science, Space and Technology Committee’s Energy Subcommittee.

The Department of the Interior named **Andrew Williams** deputy director of congressional affairs in the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs. He worked for the Senate Western Caucus and was Senate Environment and Public Works Fisheries, Water and Wildlife Subcommittee staff director.

Eocene Environmental Group hired **Laura Bachmeier** as a livestock specialist. She was business development director of meat at the Agricultural Utilization Research Institute and earlier director of pork quality and safety at the National Pork Board.

Justin Rhee joined the Department of the Interior as a special adviser to Secretary Doug Burgum. He was a professional staff member on the House Natural Resources Committee’s Indian and Insular Affairs Subcommittee. Earlier in his career, Rhee worked for The Heritage Foundation.

Hilmar named **Greg Schlafer** as CEO. He previously was CEO of Foremost Farms USA and president of Lamb Weston. He worked at General Mills for over 20 years. He has served on the board of directors of the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives, International Dairy Foods Association and National Milk Producers Federation.

The Tire Recycling Foundation named **Stephanie Mull** executive director. Mull was recently a senior sustainability manager at PepsiCo focused on PFNA fleet decarbonization.

The Illinois Environmental Council hired **Cate Caldwell** as a senior policy manager. She served Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., as a correspondence manager and legislative correspondent.

Former AgReliant Genetics chief operating officer **Craig Anderson** was named CEO of Ag Alumni Seed. He was most recently chief operating officer at Dryland Genetics, a research-based agriculture startup focused on proso millet.

Olivia Rinesmith was promoted to marketing strategist at Stratovation Group. She has been with the company for a year, most recently as a marketing specialist. Rinesmith studied agricultural communications at The Ohio State University.

OurEnergyPolicy promoted **Jordan Crowe** to senior director of policy and programs. He was a program director. Crowe was a trade policy coordinator at the U.S. Grains Council.

AgSouth Farm Credit president and CEO **Vance Dalton** announced his retirement in January 2026. He has worked for Farm Credit for 32 years, including 12 as CEO. The AgSouth board of directors is seeking Dalton's successor in collaboration with Farm Credit Consulting Services.


Ellen Lupkes (WFPF photo)

The World Food Prize Foundation hired **Ellen Lupkes** as senior manager of global youth programs and partnerships focused on the Global Youth Institute and Iowa Youth Institute. An Iowa native and Iowa State University graduate, Lupkes was team lead at AgriCorps in Ghana and program facilitator in Liberia.

The American Conservation Coalition announced new staff members. **Vale Sloane** was named major gifts officer. He was vice president of development for the Federalist Society. **Sam Kessler** was named senior government affairs manager. He was a congressional fellow in the office of Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick, R-Pa., from the Climate Solutions Foundation, focused on supporting market-based policy solutions to climate mitigation and adaptation challenges. Additional new staff members include **Alina Clough** as strategic communications program manager and **Patrick Burland** as digital communications manager.

TopSoe hired **Scott Shiller** as head of U.S. federal affairs. He was a principal at Padron USA and earlier was legislative director for now-EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin when he was a member of Congress. Shiller also worked at the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Clear Path named **Campbell Fain** chief financial officer. He was previously senior financial manager at R Street Institute and controller at the National Republican Senatorial Committee.

Amy Myers is now covering agriculture, environment and energy as a legislative assistant for Rep. Nellie Pou, D-N.J. She was a legislative correspondent for Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio.

Jeremy Symons launched the Center for Energy & Environmental Analysis, a nonpartisan think tank. He has been a principal at Symons Public Affairs and worked for the Environmental Defense Fund, Environmental Protection Agency, National Wildlife Federation and Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

Yanmar Compact Equipment named **Anna Christine Sgro** president of the North American region. She has held senior executive roles at Volvo Construction Equipment, Strongco Equipment and Ritchie Bros.

Best Regards,

Philip Brasher
Editor