

National Alfalfa & Forage Alliance

2nd Annual D.C. Fly-In • February 14-16, 2012

by Beth Nelson and Jon Dockter, NAFA

Alfalfa is key to sustainable agricultural systems and is an economic engine in rural communities - its value for soil conservation, nitrogen fixation, energy savings, crop rotation, and wildlife habitat is unsurpassed. However, alfalfa must offer a competitive value for farmers in order to provide these benefits and maintain or expand its acreage base. Being recognized in policy and research funding decisions is critical in keeping pace with other cropping choices.

The National Alfalfa & Forage Alliance (NAFA) recently hosted its 2nd Annual "D.C. Fly-In" where nearly 50 NAFA members, representing 14 states, worked the Hill with the mission of building recognition for the nation's 4th most valuable field crop.

Focusing specifically on House and Senate Agriculture and Agriculture Appropriations Committee members, the message to lawmakers focused on the 16% decline in alfalfa acreages over the last 10 years (graph) and the importance of equitable funding for public research when compared to other large crops such as corn, wheat, and soybean. The disparity in USDA-ARS research

funding is significant (table) and while it is not the only factor, NAFA believes the lack of public research plays a role in the steady decline in alfalfa acreage. Not only is public research lacking at USDA-ARS, but the commitment to the alfalfa/forage industry is also waning at land grant institutions through USDA-NIFA.

Being recognized in public policy as the new farm bill is written was also a key message to lawmakers. The conservation benefits of the alfalfa/forage industry should not be overlooked.

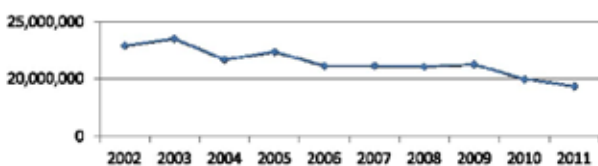
Besides Congressional meetings, NAFA met with: 1) EPA to continue dialogue about crop protection tools for the alfalfa seed industry, the PESP (Pesticide Environmental Stewardship Program) for alfalfa seed, and the Renewable Fuels Standard II (RFSII) for alfalfa forage; 2) Brandon Willis, Senior Policy Advisor to Secretary Vilsack, to talk about the state of the industry and farm bill issues; 3) USDA-NASS to talk about alfalfa forage statistics; and 4) USDA-ARS to discuss how best to use limited research funding to the greatest benefit of the alfalfa/forage industry.

The "Alfalfa on the Hill: Bluegrass Style" reception, a popular D.C. Fly-In highlight, gave Congressional members and their staff the opportunity to visit informally with NAFA members about alfalfa and forage. In addition to the bluegrass band, the reception featured an 'alfalfa'-intensive menu including mini cheeseburgers, lamb chops, assorted cheeses, vegetables with alfalfa sprout dip, ice cream bars, etc. Over 220 staff and members attended the event.

In total, NAFA participated in more than 110 meetings, educating Congressional members and agency staff about the importance of the nation's 4th most valuable crop and the urgency in being recognized in policy and research funding decisions.



U.S. Alfalfa Acreage 2002-2011 (-15.7%)



Source: National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)

FY '12 USDA Research Expenditures by Crop

Crop	\$million	Scientist Years	# of Projects
Corn	44.6	109.9	108
Cotton	42.6	104.2	68
Wheat	42.1	95	145
Soybean	34.5	82.9	84
Apple	9.9	24	26
Tomato	8.5	19.7	43
Sorghum	8.4	22.3	27
Greens/leafy veg	6.9	15.4	19
Alfalfa	3.7	9.9	14
Sunflower	3.2	8.1	8
Carrot	0.8	1.6	5
Canola	0.7	1.6	5

Source: Agricultural Research Information System

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