ARAgPolicyForumPerdue

Ag Policy Forum addresses trade, animal diseases

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A full venue welcomed USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue to an Ag Policy Forum during the Farm Progress Show that addressed trade, animal diseases and more.

Members of the Illinois congressional delegation hosted the event, including U.S. Reps. Rodney Davis, R-Taylorville; John Shimkus, R-Collinsville; Mike Bost, R-Murphysboro; and Darin LaHood, R-Dunlap. In addition, several Illinois state legislators were present.

The majority of individuals who asked questions represented Illinois Farm Bureau, Illinois Pork Producers Association, Illinois Soybean Association, American Soybean Association, Illinois Corn Marketing Board, Illinois Hemp Growers Association, University of Illinois, Illinois Manufacturers’ Association, Illinois Beef Association, Marquis Energy and Brandt Consolidated.

Overall, attendees expressed thanks for the work Perdue, President Donald Trump and many others are doing on behalf of agricultural issues in Washington, D.C. However, many attendees expressed concerns about trade, including the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement and the North American Free Trade Agreement, as well as the ongoing trade and tariff disputes with China.

Perdue noted that Trump is aware of the slump going on in agriculture, and the stress it is causing. Regarding trade, Perdue said the administration realizes the Marketing Facilitation Program is not going to make anyone whole, but that it will provide some relief.

“We know that Mexico and Canada are extremely important to our domestic agricultural production, and we need to get it done,” said Perdue. “We think that President Trump did what he said he was going to do, which was get us a better deal. Hopefully, we will get that done soon when Congress returns to D.C. When we get back, the Japan deal will be announced, then we are going to the other countries. UK is a great potential … and the President is already building the bridges there.”

Regarding China, Perdue noted, “The ball is in China’s court. We do not know what they are going to do.”

The Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS), and concerns about the retroactive small refinery exemptions were also discussed. Perdue noted that the president will have news on RFS, and there are mitigation efforts in the works.

“The president has authorized E15 year-round, now let’s get out there and grow E15. If we give customers, the infrastructure and the pumps … let those customers choose. We have the ability to grow demand right here in this country,” said Perdue.

Animal disease concerns were expressed, including African swine fever (AFS) and foot-and-mouth disease. “We are very aware of AFS, and the industry did a good job of combatting foot-and-mouth disease,” said Perdue. The broader global mobility today is really a challenge.”

Other questions included the accuracy of the latest National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) report, hemp production regulations and infrastructure.

“Regarding NASS, I am confident that they have consistent statistical protocols … and they should not be subject to any kind of political influence,” said Perdue.

He noted that hemp has a lot of potential uses and research is currently being done, as well as the fact that financial institutions should realize hemp is a legal commodity that can be banked. Addressing infrastructure, Perdue stated that in order to grow demand is grown from infrastructure.

Concerns about broadband internet connectivity in rural areas was also discussed. “There is a lot of inequity. Our rural areas will not continue to thrive if we don’t get connectivity. Broadband, I believe, is a fundamental, transformational issue for this country,” Perdue said.

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