

NESAWG 2015 *It Takes A Region* Conference

Sustaining Farm Bill Wins and Preparing for Future Federal Advocacy Opportunities

Presenter: Sophia Kruszewski (National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition)

Presentation:

- NSAC – grassroots coalition, represented and participating members, policy comes from members' interests
- Federal Policy Landscape
 - What is the Farm Bill?
 - Most recent bill was passed in 2014
 - Creates new and reauthorizes old programs with mandatory or discretionary funding
 - Funding created for food stamps and nutrition, crop insurance, conservation, and commodity programs, local food access, research, etc
 - The Legislative Process
 - Pre-authorization and Hearings >> Authorization >> Appropriation >> Implementation >> Evaluation and Oversight
 - Current Ag Committee and Ag Approps Committee Make Up
 - Senate Ag Committee, House Ag Committee
 - Senate Ag Approp Committee, House Ag Approp Committee
 - Why Ag Appropriations Matter
 - Process by which programs can acquire funding
 - Protect funding for current programs funded through the Farm Bill (like conservation)
 - Play defense on bad policy riders
 - Biotech Rider (Protection for Monsanto Act)
 - Current Federal Policy Issues
 - New Food Safety Rules (i.e. FSMA)
 - Farm Bill implementation
- Farm Bill Implementation
- How to keep up with the latest news?
 - NSAC's Grassroots Guide
 - Sign up for Grants.gov
 - Federal Register
- Status of agriculture appropriations
 - \$300 million cut for crop insurance
- Sustaining Farm Bill Wins
 - Apply for grants; provide feedback to the USDA; tell your story to the media;

evaluate program use and efficiency in your state or region; participate in appropriation advocacy

- Need for More Champions
 - Legislative champions are key to moving our issues through Congress
 - Many of our long-time champions have retired
- How do we build champions?
 - Legislators want to hear from constituents who vote (in addition to experts and lobbyists)
- Building Congressional Champions
 - Local, in-person events; consider awards for champions; farm tours/ tours of grant-funded efforts (farm to school, etc.)
- **Lessons from the field: New England Farmers Union tips for building congressional champions:**
 - Get your community members activated
 - Congressional members need to be moved by farmers' perspectives
 - Congress members care about what your organization is doing for their constituents
 - Show congress members what your organization and/or farm is doing
 - Congress members have staff retreats in the state – good opportunity for setting up visits
 - When meeting with members of Congress, you should be prepared with solutions to address the issue
 - You can try to acquire cooperative agreements for money for outreach, etc
 - Effective lobbying and advocacy is about relationships
 - Let them know what the impacts are of not receiving support
 - Need republican support because they are (seem) to be the majority
 - Nonprofits can comment on laws/regulations that have been passed (not considered lobbying)
 - Farmers might think that one dollar for a loaf of bread is too cheap but for low-income households, it's affordable
 - Need to have a good relationship with state departments of agriculture
 - Crop insurance is available for “non-commodity crops”
 - Corn, wheat, soybeans - can be stored
 - Crop insurance is extending to other crops
 - The Northeast does not have the same capacity for distribution and processing compared to other parts of the U.S.
- **Note from attendee**
 - Process of accessing funds is a very demoralizing process
 - There are many bureaucratic hurdles to acquiring funds and support
- It is important to think about agricultural versus nutritional interests for Farm Bill advocacy