

Weekly Market Bulletin

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Governor

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From Your Commissioner...

Eventful Week for New Hampshire Agriculture

In the last week farmers have had to deal with frigid, windy weather. Two farms were recovering from major fires. Two high-ranking USDA officials visited the state. The legislature continues to hold hearings on various bills affecting agriculture, and this week is Farm & Forest.

A fast-moving fire destroyed a barn owned by David Leach in Sandwich, killing the livestock inside, including 11 head of cattle, three pigs, eight goats and a flock of about four dozen chickens. Firefighters were able to keep the fire from spreading to the farm house and a shed.

Earlier the same day, fire struck several greenhouses at Pleasant View Gardens in Loudon. "With everything going on in the world, we're blessed that this is just plants," noted Henry Huntington, president of the family-owned company, in the wake of the fire. "As much of a disaster as this is, no one was hurt, and the damage was really minimal."

The fire destroyed nearly an acre of greenhouses and a support building—but that's less than a tenth of the Huntington family's total production capacity at their two locations, the home farm in Loudon and a second property in Pembroke. The premier growers of liners and finished plants continued to ship product without interruption. Henry says they will rebuild, but at the Pembroke site, and plan to have spring planting continue on schedule. They expect customers will see no interruption in service, quality or supply.

"We want to express our overwhelming thanks—the support was amazing," Henry Huntington said in a phone call. "The calls, the emails—it's great to be part of an industry like this where we all come together when we have a disaster. We're all families."

Early last week the new Under Secretary for Natural Resources, Harris Sherman visited New Hampshire and neighboring states to learn about the priorities and needs of our farm and forest industries. Sherman, who oversees the Forest Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, met in New Castle with NRCS and other agricultural leaders from New Hampshire and Maine. He heard about the vital importance of land protection and agricultural conservation programs for our states and region.

On Friday Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan made two stops in New Hampshire. In the morning she spoke to an overflow crowd at UNH on USDA's 'Know your farmer, know your food' initiative. COLSA Dean Tom Brady estimated a crowd of 200 packed the room in the recently renovated DeMerritt Hall, and some had to be turned away. With only a couple days notice, a mix of students, faculty, staff, farmers, and other members of the public came to hear Merrigan speak. Her talk was videotaped, and COLSA officials hope to soon have it available on their website. Merrigan was accompanied by USDA press aide Aaron LaVallee, proudly sporting his UNH alumni lapel pin.

Merrigan, a Massachusetts native and former faculty member at Tufts University in Agriculture, Food and Environment, then joined a meeting in Concord exploring ways to collaborate regionally to increase agricultural economic

sustainability and conserve farmland. The New England Farm and Food Security initiative is part of the New England Governors Conference Blue Ribbon Commission on Land Conservation. The New England state departments of agriculture heads and other leaders of local farm and food efforts met to explore opportunities to work toward securing stability for the region's dairy industry, strengthening farm to school and other institutional food programs, increasing meat slaughter and processing capacity, analyzing the impacts of food safety regulations on small and medium sized farms, and farmland conservation.

Many of us at the department will be at the Farm & Forest Expo on Friday and Saturday this week. As usual, the hardest part will be deciding which programs to attend on the jam-packed schedule.

Lorraine Merrill, Commissioner