

Subsidies: Gaines One of Top Funded Counties

From Page 1A

though 2011, Gaines County ranked third in the U.S. in the receipt of commodity subsidies, totaling a shade under \$847 million, according to figures from the Environmental Working Group, a nonprofit research organization based in Washington, D.C.

A commodity subsidy is a governmental subsidy paid to farmers and agribusinesses to supplement their income, manage the supply of agricultural commodities, and influence the cost and supply of such commodities.

Examples of such commodities include wheat, feed grains (grain used as fodder, such as maize or corn, sorghum, barley, and oats), cotton, milk, rice, peanuts, sugar, tobacco, and oilseeds such

as soybeans.

Such governmental subsidies include direct payments, Counter-Cyclical Payments (CCPs), Marketing Loans, LDPs and Certificates, Average Crop Revenue Election Program (ACRE), and Disaster Payments.

The United States currently pays around \$20 billion per year to farmers in direct subsidies as "farm income stabilization via U.S. farm bills. These bills pre-date the economic turmoil of the Great Depression with the 1922 Grain Futures Act, the 1929 Agricultural Marketing Act and the 1933 Agricultural Adjustment Act creating a tradition of government support.

Between the 1995-2011 timeframe, EWG database figures showed Gaines County farmers had

received \$475.4 million in cotton subsidies, while peanut farmers received \$154.8 million

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) landowners received \$102.2 million in subsidies during that time frame, while \$84.4 million was paid out to Gaines County farmers for disaster claims. Wheat subsidies claims within Gaines County totaled \$15.8 million.

Besides putting a "hard" cap on payments per farmer, the bill would crack down on payments to investors and absentee landlords. Under it, only one person living in town could collect subsidies for providing management on a given farm.

Passage of the package "would put an end to widespread abuse in farm programs," said the National

Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, which represents small farmers. It said the chances for passage of a new farm bill would be boosted by the inclusion of meaningful payment limits.

Although the Senate included similar reforms in its farm bill last year, the version approved by the House Agriculture Committee rejected them. Both bills died at the end of 2012 so Congress must start over on the bill this year.

Grassley said he was confident the Senate would adopt the package this year. Senators Mike Enzi, an Wyoming Republican; Tim Johnson, a South Dakota Democrat; and Sherrod Brown, an Ohio Democrat, joined Grassley as sponsors. Brown and Grassley are members of the Senate Agriculture Committee.

The senators proposal would allow grain, cotton and soybean growers to collect up to \$50,000 a year for all crop subsidies and

\$75,000 annually from the marketing loan program, for a total of \$125,000 per farmer. The total would double to \$250,000 for a married couple.

At present, there is a \$105,000 limit per farmer, or \$210,000 per couple, on crop subsidies and no limit on marketing loan benefits, so there is no overall limit on payments.

The senators said a stricter definition of who qualifies for subsidies, known as the "actively engaged" rule, would greatly reduce the flow of subsidies to investors and absentee owners who take no role in running a farm but who say they provide key management direction.

Farm subsidies are available to people who provide land, equipment or capital and 1,000 hours of labor per year or active management. A decade ago, a congressional commission

suggested more stringent rules on what qualifies as management.

"For too long farm program payments have gone to producers who do not need the support -- and sometimes to people who are not involved in farming," said Brown.

The 2008 farm law was the first to deny subsidies to the wealthiest farmers, or those with more than \$1.25 million in adjusted gross income. It also ended the "three-entity rule" that allowed growers to collect subsidies directly and through two affiliates.

Payment limits are a perennially divisive issue in U.S. agriculture, pitting cotton and rice growers in the South against the wheat, corn and soybean farmers of the Plains and Midwest, and big operators against small farmers. Cotton and rice have the highest support rates but also high costs of production.

Cornyn, Cruz Call for Delay of Prairie Chicken Decision

DALLAS (AP) — U.S. Sens. John Cornyn and Ted Cruz are asking federal wildlife officials to delay a decision on whether to enact protections for the lesser prairie chicken.

Cornyn and Cruz were joined by other Republican senators Thursday in urging the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to wait at least six months before deciding whether to list the prairie grouse as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

They say adopting federal protections will impair oil and gas development, agriculture and other sectors that drive local economies.

They also want to extend a comment period allowing the agency to receive further feedback.

"The outcome of this listing proposal is vitally important to many sectors in the local economies of our states, including agriculture; oil and gas development; ranching; transportation; and wind energy," wrote Cornyn.

"Listing the Lesser Prairie Chicken under the Endangered Species Act would negatively impact these sectors for many years to come. With this in mind, and knowing that conservation efforts are ongoing and that the science

evaluating the status of the species is still developing, it is imperative to provide sufficient time to evaluate the true health of the species rather than simply hold fast to arbitrary court-mandated deadlines that do not account for ongoing species recovery developments."

The letter acknowledges that the wild life agencies in five states home to the Lesser Prairie Chicken, including Texas, are working hard to finalize and submit a conservation plan by mid-March, the same time as the comment period is scheduled to end.

The 60-day extension would allow state agencies time to incorporate comments to the Service's proposal as well as allow the states to complete this spring's aerial population survey, which is conducted in the month of April.

Experts say the population of the lesser prairie chicken has declined in part due to expansion of farms, ranches and energy industry operations across the Southwest and other states.

Filing: From Page 1A

Siemens and Gray are completing their respective first terms of office as hospital board members.

Candidates wishing to seek election to the SHD Board of Directors, or any of the five other local municipal entities who have positions up for election in the May 11 general elections process have until 5 p.m. Friday, March 1, to file their intentions.

Both seats up for consideration upon the Seminole Independent School District's Board of Trustees will see elections this May, according to school officials on Friday.

Seminole resident Trey Duncan, according to SISD officials, filed his intentions to seek election to the Place 3 seat upon the board on Friday, which will pit him against fellow Seminole resident Rex Darby, who filed his intentions earlier this week.

The Place 3 seat on the board is currently held by Seminole ISD Board President Jerry Don Foote, who had not filed re-election intentions as of press time, according to school administration officials.

The district's Place 4 seat race -- thus far -- will feature incumbent seat holder and SISD Board Secretary Jacob Loewen against challenger Kyle Freeman.

Both men filed their election intentions early in the filing process.

In last week's polling three of six Gaines County entities reported incumbent candidate filings for their respective seats.

Officials with the Seagraves Independent School District's Superintendent's Office stated Dist. 1 incumbent Grady Billings has filed his intentions to serve on the board. District 2 and 3 Trustees Tim Carmichael and Sulema Cortez had both filed their respective intentions to seek re-election to the board last week.

Filing for the board, along with the five other local municipalities who will host May 11 elections, runs through 5 p.m. March 1.

Officials with the Llano Estacado Underground Water Conservation District said Thursday three incumbent members of the board had filed their intentions to seek re-election to the entity's seven-member panel.

Those incumbents include Pct. 2 representative Charles Roland, Pct. 4 representative Robert Warren, and At-Large board member Weldon Shook.

City of Seagraves officials, on Thursday, confirmed that Dist. 2 Councilman Charles Evans had filed re-election intentions for his seat, while the District 1 seat filing list remained blank. That seat is currently held Councilman Henry Winsor.

Seminole City Secretary Debbie Gressett confirmed on Friday morning Dist. 1, Place 1 seat holder -- and current Mayor Pro-Tem -- Rey Saldana had filed intentions to seek re-election to the Seminole City Council in May's election.

For late-breaking news concerning Gaines County interests, log on with us! www.seminolesentinel.com

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