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THE GOLDEN FLEECE AWARD



Golden Fleece Awarded to Agriculture Risk Management Agency Outreach Efforts Aim to Increase Taxpayer Tab for Crop Insurance

Washington, DC - Today, Taxpayers for Common Sense awarded the Golden Fleece to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Risk Management Agency (RMA) for wasting taxpayer funds on risk management education for crops ranging from Christmas trees to turf grass.

"While the program is purported to help underserved producers and crops, grants also teach agricultural producers how to squeeze more money out of taxpayer-subsidized crop insurance," said Ms. Ryan Alexander, president of Taxpayers for Common Sense. "Taxpayer dollars have been wasted on conferences and entertainment sessions to inform producers about ways to manage business risks, many of which are already covered by the private sector. With the nation teetering on the edge of the fiscal cliff, taxpayers shouldn't be teaching agribusinesses how to reach deeper into Uncle Sam's pockets."

Since the Great Depression, the federal government has subsidized nearly all business risks agricultural producers face. Recently, crop insurance has become the largest taxpayer support for agribusinesses, costing \$11 billion last year and potentially \$15 billion or more this year. Washington not only subsidizes crop insurance premiums, but also the agents and companies selling and servicing policies. Through USDA's Education and Outreach Cooperative Agreements Programs, more taxpayer money is spent on duplicative programs informing producers about risk management and federally subsidized crop insurance, regardless of whether crops are grown in suitable areas or other unsubsidized risk management options exist.

RMA's "Targeted States" and "Education and Outreach" programs spent nearly \$13 million this year to fund crop insurance education for producers of everything from the most widely grown and highest subsidized crop in the nation – corn – to Christmas trees, turf grass, peony flowers, and ornamental fish. Examples of wasteful grants included in RMA's November 20th announcement include:

- **National Christmas Tree Association (NCTA):** received a [\\$55,000 grant](#) "to provide crop insurance education and to help Christmas tree growers understand and manage risk." [Last year](#), RMA also awarded NCTA \$72,500 to help fund its 2012 convention and [trade show](#) in Sacramento where winners of the National Christmas Tree Contest and the National Wreath Contest were chosen. One participant described the convention on [Facebook](#) as: "3 days of parties for the NTCA board now the real meetings begin."
- **South Dakota Corn Growers Association:** \$99,924 grant "to provide crop insurance education" to a state with enrollment rates below the national average and a 2006 grant worth \$140,000 for an [annual meeting](#) and other activities like a grassroots lobbying campaign for the 2008 farm bill and a humorist specializing in farm family relationships.
- **Prune Bargaining Association:** \$99,429 [grant](#) "to provide crop insurance education and to assure that the best ideas are generated and to reduce the risk that poorly thought out unilateral decision making reduces the competitive viability of producers."

“The fiscal cliff is just three weeks away. Congress must learn to prioritize spending to better utilize our precious tax dollars and tame our \$16 trillion national debt,” continued Alexander. “By eliminating programs that spend money to teach agribusiness how to get lavish federal subsidies, lawmakers can demonstrate that they are ready to work together and get our nation’s finances under control.”

The Golden Fleece award was created in 1975 by the late Senator William Proxmire. It is intended to highlight instances of wasteful spending. After retirement, Sen. Proxmire served as Honorary Chairman of Taxpayers for Common Sense's Advisory Board and passed the mantle of the Golden Fleece to the organization in 2000.

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