

Now That Sonny Perdue Has Been Confirmed ...

Soon, President Donald Trump is scheduled to hold a meeting at the White House where he will sign an executive order to launch a new task force aimed at promoting American agriculture and improving rural prosperity.

Newly sworn-in Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue is expected to play a central role in those discussions and efforts. The task force will effectively replace President Barack Obama's Rural Council, which the Trump administration says had mixed results and failed to accomplish its goals.

While the new task force will provide much of the same input, it will be focused on the new president's agenda of regulatory reform and promoting job creation, innovation and general prosperity for Americans. Among those who have been invited to the join the task force, and who will be involved in Tuesday's discussions are:

- Former Oklahoma state Rep. Lisa Johnson-Billy, who operates a 200-acre family farm;
- American Farm Bureau Federation President Zippy Duvall, a broiler chicken and cattle farmer from Perdue's home state of Georgia;
- National FFA Central Region Vice President Valerie Earley, a native of Minnesota who is studying agriculture education;
- Former California Secretary of Food & Agriculture A.G. Kawamura, who has experience in both conventional and organic farming and has experience with urban sprawl in Orange County, Calif.;
- Dairy production farmer Luke Brubaker of Pennsylvania;
- Iowa Secretary of Agriculture & Land Stewardship Bill Northey, who has continued to operate a corn and soybean

- farm;
- Nursery and landscape production specialist Tom Demaline of Ohio;
 - Former Florida Forestry Association President Lynetta Usher Griner, who also raises cattle in both Florida and Kansas;
 - Cattle rancher and sorghum producer Terry Swanson of Colorado;
 - North Carolina Commissioner of Agriculture Steve Troxler, a former tobacco, wheat, soybean and vegetable farmer;
 - Pork producer James Lamb of North Carolina, who also produces cattle, corn, soybeans, millet and Bermuda grass, and is an environmental specialist with Prestage Farms;
 - Cattle producer Hank Choate of Michigan, a seventh-generation farmer who specializes in Holstein cattle and also produces corn, alfalfa, soybeans and wheat;
 - Dairy producer and vegetable farmer Maureen Torrey of New York, who also operates a grain farm and trucking business and
 - Hormel Vice President of Farm Operations Jose Rojas of Colorado.

Monday afternoon, special assistant to the President for Agriculture, Trade and Food Assistance Ray Starling, a member of the National Economic Council, briefed the media on what to expect from the meeting. He said:

Our intention tomorrow is for the president to meet each of these folks to hear a little bit about their operation and to hear what's on their minds. As we point out, in terms of pure numbers, the ag sector does not make up a large part of the population, but certainly those engaged in the allied industry sector do and their economic impact in rural communities across America certainly allows them to punch above their weight, if you will. We also brag on them.

Certainly we have the most efficient farmers in the world, the most effective at producing our food, and that's why we pay a lower percentage of our income on food than any country in the world ...

[W]e certainly expect a wide range of topics to come up, as is evidenced by the wide range of folks who will be attending the meeting. They are listed there for you. I will not insult you by reading them, but certainly the list could grow longer. All of these things are issues that those of us in agriculture see as potential limiting factors economically and things that we need to address.

I think that then sets up exactly—that need is what sets up the task force that the President will establish tomorrow. He will be asking Gov. Perdue—hopefully by tomorrow Secretary Perdue—to establish a task force that does a 180-day review of regulations, policies, legislation that unnecessarily hinders economic growth in the agricultural sector.

We will also, in the course of that executive order, sunset the current makeup of the Rural Council. We certainly think they did some important work, and we're glad that they focused on rural America and brought some of the members of the last administration together. However, there are very few records formally of their meetings. I think a blog was maintained, but very little in the way of their accomplishments. And so one of the things that we will ask the task force to do is to take a look at, were we to create another body along those lines, what would that need to look like and how could it be most effective at establishing cross-agency communication and cross-agency collaboration that's good for agriculture. {eoa}