



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the
Week of March 8, 2010**

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Agriculture on Front Burner

JEFFERSON CITY – Last year I received assurances from Senate leaders that agricultural issues would receive priority during the 2010 legislative session, but I am frustrated that we have burned through the first half of the session without focusing on our state's number one industry. Thankfully, that will begin to change when the General Assembly returns from its spring break next week.

I've been staying busy during our break traveling throughout the 18th Senate District and talking to farmers about these issues. This week I also traveled to Ankeny, Iowa, to attend a U.S. Department of Justice field hearing on competition in the seed industry, which relates to two of the bills I am sponsoring before a Senate committee next week.

On Wednesday, March 17, the Missouri Senate Agriculture, Food Production and Outdoor Resources Committee will hold a public hearing on three bills I am sponsoring which are important to the future of agriculture in Missouri. I encourage farmers and everyone else involved in agriculture production to attend this hearing.

[Senate Bill 667](#) creates the Missouri Seed Availability and Competition Act. Farmers who want to retain patented seed from a current harvest for planting the following season must register with the Department of Agriculture and pay a fee of \$7 per bushel of saved seed. Under the act, a farmer will only be liable for health, safety, or environmental impacts if he or she intentionally or negligently fails to significantly follow the patent holder's or manufacturer's instructions and guidelines for planting the seed.

I have filed similar legislation every session since 2001, and I am frustrated that numerous small seed companies have been bought by Monsanto since I first filed this

legislation. I think we need some kind of Public Service Commission-type entity to oversee and protect services that are vital to our farmers.

[Senate Bill 766](#) creates procedures that a patent holder of genetically-modified seed must follow before entering onto private farmland to take plant samples. Specifically, the patent holder must notify the farmer in writing of the suspected breach of contract or patent infringement; provide a copy of the notification to the director of the Department of Agriculture; obtain written permission from the farmer to enter the property; and inform the farmer of the required procedures described in the act.

Right now, a corporation like Monsanto can launch an investigation to see if a farmer is using genetically-modified seed without telling the farmer or anyone else what they are doing. If the Missouri State Highway Patrol does an investigation, they have to notify the local sheriff, and I think Monsanto and others should follow the same rules. We've had investigators who've been cornered by farmers on their own property wanting to know why they are there and what they are doing.

Finally, [Senate Bill 622](#) increases the fee for registering a pesticide in Missouri. Under current law, the fee for registering a pesticide in Missouri is \$15 per year. This act increases the fee to \$150 plus one-fifth of 1 percent of the product's annual gross sales in Missouri up to a maximum total fee of \$1,500 per product. Under current law, there is a late charge of \$5 assessed for any pesticide not registered by January 1. This act increases the late charge to \$50.

We're still charging \$15 per year to register these chemicals when all of the states around us are charging these out-of-state corporations an average of \$150 per year, so Missouri is losing out on more than \$1.3 million each year.

Senate Bills 622, 667 and 766 will be heard in committee beginning at noon, Wednesday, March 17 in Senate Committee Room 1 on the first floor of the Capitol. We'll put on a big pot of ham and beans for the folks who take the time and trouble to travel to Jefferson City to attend this hearing. Agriculture is Missouri's number one industry and I think these bills will help keep it that way, but I need the help and support of Missouri's farmers to get these bills through the Legislature.

If you have any questions or comments about these or any other issues, give my Capitol office a call at (573) 751-7852, send me an email at wes.shoemyer@senate.mo.gov, or drop a line to Room 434, State Capitol, 201 W. Capitol Ave., Jefferson City, MO 65101.