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The State of U.S. Agriculture Update

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In recent months, there have been a number of developments in the realm of US and international agriculture policy. In this briefing update, we will discuss a new bill introduced to US Congress, as well as scientific and legislative action undertaken in the US and abroad.

In the Senate, Senate Alex Padilla (D-CA) introduced S.2479, the “Converting Our Waste Sustainably (COWS) Act of 2023.” Though at present this bill looks unlikely to become a law, it aims to develop an “alternative manure program,” which would be implemented by the Secretary of Agriculture (Converting Our Waste Sustainably (COWS) Act of 2023, 2023).

Researchers at the University of Minnesota have been looking into ways to help reduce the methane production of dairy cows naturally. Though research is still early, it seems that feeding red seaweed native to Hawaii is having positive impact on the amount of waste produced by cows. Researchers are hoping that diet changes, including the use of this red seaweed, might reduce methane production by as much as 50% (Morgan, 2023). Thus far, they have only experimented with substituting a small fraction of the cow’s normal food with the red seaweed, which they say makes it feasible for farmers to be able to implement in their own herds.

Additionally, in Canada, a dairy farmer has started to intentionally breed cattle which will produce less methane than the average dairy cow. Ben Loewith has intentionally selected bulls which produce less methane to use in the artificial insemination of his cows, in the hopes that the calves born will be more environmentally friendly (Nickel, 2023). These new scientific experimentations may suggest that progress can be made in the realm of methane production without advanced technologies or sacrifices by American consumers.

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