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IT'S TIME FOR A NEW FARM BILL



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Farm Bill History

About 90 years ago, the country was in the grips of the Great Depression. The Dust Bowl was smothering farmland and pastures. Crop prices were on the decline following the end of the first World War. It was not a great time to be a farmer.

This is the backdrop for the first “farm bill,” the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933. Part of the New Deal, this first farm bill aimed to create programs that would reduce surplus and raise crop prices, namely through the use of farm subsidies. Five years later, legislators replaced the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 with – you guessed it – the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938, which established the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation and included soil conservation measures. It was another 10 years before another farm bill was passed, and it was the Agricultural Act of 1949 that established the “permanent” ag legislation that is technically still in effect today in amended form.

The farm bill began a significant shift in the 1970s when food assistance programs became a permanent fixture in the legislation, leading to the “omnibus” bills we are now familiar with. The farm bills of the late 70s and 80s introduced more rural development and conservation programs.

The nutrition title is the most expensive title in the farm bill, dominating almost 80% of the bill’s spending. It governs programs utilized by people who cannot afford to buy food in times of difficulty. As part of the federal welfare program portfolio, there is criticism from some quarters about the title’s spending levels. This has made the nutrition title a political bone of contention through decades of farm bill debate, but the inclusion of nutrition programs in the farm bill is critical to building a coalition of support. Without it, there simply would not be enough rural votes to pass a new bill.

Why We Need a Farm Bill

The farm bill is a critical tool for ensuring our nation’s food supply remains secure. Funding for this comprehensive package, which could more accurately be called a food and farm bill, includes risk management tools for farmers, access to nutrition for low-income families, conservation programs and investments in agricultural research.

No one buys insurance for the good times, and similarly, farm bill programs provide critical tools to help farmers and ranchers manage the risks brought on by tough economic times and severe weather. The 2018 farm bill brought certainty to farm and ranch families through enhancements to crop insurance, improved risk management programs and support for beginning farmers and ranchers, while also providing much-needed funding for trade development and ag research. The entire package was budget neutral and received strong bipartisan support.

The farm bill is reauthorized every five years. Congress passed an extension of the 2018 farm bill, which will now expire on September 30, 2024. Congress must pass a modernized farm bill in order to fully protect our food, land and livelihoods. In fact, if a farm bill isn’t signed into law before the current extension runs out, many programs will lose funding while others will revert back to the 1949 law, which would have significant negative impacts in today’s marketplace. The threat of permanent law is usually significant enough to ensure new farm bills are passed or current ones extended.

Farm Bill Priorities

Farming is a difficult and risky business, yet critical to the well-being of our nation. Food security is national security. Few pieces of legislation are more significant than the farm bill when it comes to ensuring our food system is secure. We urge lawmakers to recognize this significance as they consider updating and improving the farm bill.

We support the following principles to guide development of programs in the next farm bill:

- Increase baseline funding commitments to farm programs;
- Maintain a unified farm bill which includes nutrition programs and farm programs together; and
- Prioritize funding for risk management tools which include both federal crop insurance and commodity programs.

The food and farm bill has been a bipartisan effort in the past. The farm bill presents an important opportunity for lawmakers to rise above partisanship and work together again to pass legislation that protects food security for all Americans and the future success of our farmers and ranchers.

Take Action

Farmers and ranchers have a golden opportunity to stress the importance of farm policy with their state and federal lawmakers, as well as the public. Many people are unaware of the benefits of the farm bill, and few are better-positioned than farmers and ranchers to provide a firsthand account.

Let’s urge Congress to follow the example of the dedicated farmers and ranchers across this country. Don’t shy away from the hard work. Deliver a new, modernized farm bill for America’s families this year.

Get the Facts: How Does the Farm Bill Matter for Everyone?

Food Security: America’s public investment in agriculture through farm bill programs helps secure our domestic food supply and keep our country strong while consumers get the benefits of high-quality, affordable food.

Jobs: The food and agriculture industry supports nearly 46.2 million U.S. jobs (that’s more than 14% of U.S. employment) and contributes more than \$1 trillion to U.S. gross domestic product.

Conservation: The farm bill’s investment in ag research and conservation programs are critical to ensuring the productivity and sustainability in our farms and domestic food supply.

Risk Management: We all depend on the success of American agriculture so it’s important for America’s farmers and ranchers to be supported by strong farm programs as they face down weather disasters, high supply costs and inflationary pressures. Managing risk is critical to keep food on our tables.

Addressing Hunger: The farm bill includes nutrition programs intended to ensure the most vulnerable among us have access to healthy, affordable food.