

THE 2018

FARM BILL



JUNE 26, 2018 UPDATE

The Farm Bill is a piece of legislation that has the ability to affect the plate and wellbeing of every single American. Its name is misleading, often persuading anyone who isn't in the agriculture business to glaze over its importance. What the name of this bill fails to depict is just how much it impacts everything from health care and climate change to jobs and economic development.

Republican leaders tried to hurry a bill through the House of Representatives in May and, while their version of the bill initially failed to generate excitement, it eventually gained support and passed during a June 21st vote. The Senate also released their version of the Farm Bill this month and will vote on a motion to invoke cloture on June 25th – a procedure that puts their bill up for consideration on the floor.

In the coming weeks the House and the Senate will need to come to an agreement about what's best for the American people, farmland and our environment. Everything from honeybees to humans will be affected by whatever they decide, and it is imperative that the final piece of legislation has our collective best interests at heart. Here's a snapshot of how the bills affect all of us:

Food Programs

While the Senate Farm Bill maintains current funding for vital federal food programs, the House bill proposes steep cuts and work requirements that are both burdensome to those needing help as well as to the states that have to monitor the program. Under the proposed House bill, many adult SNAP participants, including parents of children above the age of 6 and older workers up to age 60, will have to prove each month that they worked, participated in a work program for at least 20 hours a week, or qualified for an exemption. States would have to develop expensive systems to track participants each month, and 3.4 million participants would need readily-available job training or employment programs – a number that goes far beyond current program capacity.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the country's most effective anti-hunger program helping 1 in 8 Americans, many of whom are children. Under the House bill, millions could lose access to food resources. In total, cuts to SNAP and TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program) would likely result in a loss of 9.2 billion meals for those in need.

The SNAP program boosts local economies by generating \$1.80 in activity for every \$1 in generated benefits. Each \$1 billion increase in SNAP benefits is estimated to create or maintain 18,000 full-time equivalent jobs, including 3,000 farm jobs. The program also provides access to healthy food that people with limited food budgets often can't afford potentially saving taxpayers millions in food-related healthcare costs each year.

Farmers

Traditionally, large agribusinesses and lobbyists have had heavy influence on our nation's food and farm policies and, sadly, those policies fail to meet the needs of the American people. Billions of dollars continue to be spent each year subsidizing nearly 30,000 of the approximately 3.1 million farmers in the United States. This results in a lack of adequate investment in small-to-medium-size farmers - the ones who work tirelessly to provide healthy, non-commodity crops. Both the House and the Senate bill fail to address the aforementioned inequities.

The Senate bill does include a silver lining for programs that strengthen the success of young farmers and sustainable food systems. It also protects the integrity of the organic seal, which is imperative for protecting both consumers and the environment.

The Environment

The proposed versions of the Farm Bill don't shed enough light on the issues related to climate change, collapsing biodiversity and severely degrading soil, water and air. The House bill removes incentives for growers to protect vulnerable lands putting water and wildlife at risk. It also introduces House Resolution 4879/3599, which would undercut states' rights to protect air, land and water quality, workers' rights, health, consumer safety, and animal welfare.

We have a narrow window of opportunity to influence the content, and repercussions, of the 2018 Farm Bill. Reach out to your representatives. Thank them for the important work they're doing, and urge them to craft a bill that takes care of Americans, our farmers, and our land.

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