



Wednesday, September 11, 2024

To: Democratic Members of the U.S. House Agriculture Committee
From: Ranking Member David Scott, U.S. House Agriculture Committee
Subject: Update on the Status of the Farm Bill

Dear Democratic Committee Colleagues:

I hope you enjoyed the August recess. I imagine you have had conversations you're your constituents on the importance of the farm bill, as I have. With the one-year extension we passed a year ago about to end, I wanted to take the opportunity to update you on the status of the farm bill.

Potential Extension

The 2018 Farm Bill expired on September 30, 2023, and we extended it for one year to September 30, 2024, which is quickly approaching.

Some farm bill provisions will continue even without an extension or new farm bill. Crop insurance is permanently authorized, SNAP is authorized to operate as long as we fund the government, and most conservation programs were authorized through FY 2031 in the Inflation Reduction Act.

For our Title 1 crop commodities and the dairy program, the practical deadline for action is January 1, 2025. You may have heard about the "dairy cliff" that happens if there is no farm bill authority in place by January 1st.

We all know that Congress needs pressure to act. That is why Chairman Thompson, Chair Stabenow, Ranking Member Boozman, and I agree we are better off without another extension at this point. The farm groups are also asking Congress to continue to work on passing a full farm bill this year and are not supporting any extension at this time.

You may have heard in the media that Speaker Johnson tried to get a year-long extension of the farm bill in the Republican Leadership's six-month Continuing Resolution, but Chairman Thompson objected. I agree with the Chairman here.

We need pressure to get us to come together on a full five-year farm bill reauthorization. That move by the Republican Leadership shows how tone-deaf they are to the challenges facing American agriculture.



If the House and Senate Agriculture Committees are able to come to a bipartisan, bicameral agreement, the hope would be that we could include the farm bill in must-pass legislation during the lame-duck session of this Congress.

Current Stats of the Farm Bill

It has been over 100 days since House Republicans advanced a partisan farm bill out of Committee. If the Chairman had the votes to pass it on the Floor, he would have done so by now. But he lacks the support of his Leadership, and he lacks the votes in his Conference to pass that bill.

I believe the Republicans now understand they need Democrats to get anything done, although they're also dealing with a Republican Leadership that won't pass anything bipartisan unless the sky is falling. GT's Leadership has also told him they're not dealing with the farm bill until the lame duck.

I am hopeful that we can reach an agreement on broad funding parameters before Members leave in September. That would allow Committee staff to start to pull together a bipartisan package of legislative text for Members to review and consider. The hope would then be for the package to be included in must-pass legislation, likely the NDAA or the appropriations omnibus package in December.

Many of you are receiving visits this week from farmers who are participating in a fly-in organized by the Title 1 commodities (corn, cotton, peanuts, rice, sorghum, soybeans) as well as the Farm Bureau and Farmers Union. The American Bankers Association and the Farm Credit Council have also sent representatives to join the farmers on their visits to discuss the current economic conditions in many of our growing areas.

While the headlines talk about declines in farm income from record levels, the last two years of high input costs, increased interest rates, and natural disasters have taken a toll on farmers' equity, kept smaller farmers from expanding, and forced others to abandon plans to take over their family operations.

We need to act now because a simple extension into next year will not yield results for these farmers. Given the start of a new congress and a new administration, it would likely be much later in 2025 before we could even begin to work on moving legislation and then implementing it.

The conservation, wildlife, and environmental groups are also supporting us in continuing our efforts this year. Waiting until 2025 lessens the amount of IRA conservation funding available to move into and protect the farm bill's permanent, mandatory conservation program baseline. Passing a farm bill this year will ensure that the IRA investments will enhance all future farm bill conservation titles.

Resorting to an extension and waiting until 2025 to pass a five-year farm bill means we would be competing for resources and Floor time as tax cuts expire and the debt ceiling will be hit. The farmers I met with indicated that if it looks like we won't be able to pass a full, five-year farm bill by the end of this year, they want us to consider doing a two-year ad hoc package that would bolster the safety net for 2024 and 2025 crop years.

This would be needed to help stem the further consolidation of our farming operations and the impacts on our rural communities.

We need to avoid further uncertainty by passing the farm bill this year. This economic threat is existential for our farmers – which I trust should motivate Members into passing a full five-year farm bill.

That is why I firmly believe we have a small window of opportunity to broker a deal with Chairwoman Stabenow, Chairman Thompson, and Ranking Member Boozman to come up with a truly bipartisan farm bill that makes smart investments in the farm safety net and expands IRA conservation investments without degrading the nutrition safety net. And I think GT's recent comments have shown he may be ready to get something done. For example, he said:

"Absolutely not. We don't want to split [nutrition programs] out of the farm bill. We need that coalition."

*"I think it's urgent that we [vote] this year. To me, I have an urgency, I want to do it before the election. I think that that's important, it's important for our farm families."*²

I am hopeful that we can come together to get a farm bill that helps farmers as they navigate a difficult farm economy. They need certainty and support, and we need to step up to the challenge. Let us redouble our efforts to pass the farm bill this year.



¹ Berglund, Lori. "At the Farm Progress Show, Vilsack, Thompson cite the need for a Farm Bill," *The Daily Freeman-Journal*. August 28, 2024. www.freemanjournal.net/news/local-news/2024/08/at-the-farm-progress-show-vilsack-thompson-cite-the-need-for-a-farm-bill

² Barnett, Brent. "Rep. Feenstra Says Producers Need Crop Insurance Certainty," *Brownfield Ag News*. August 30, 2024. www.brownfieldagnews.com/news/rep-feenstra-says-producers-need-crop-insurance-certainty