

Overview

U.S. agriculture production helps feed the world, but farm to table isn't a simple process. U.S. food and energy production, land conservation, nutrition and wellness programs are some of the many issues managed daily by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). USDA is one of the largest federal agencies and has expansive oversight and regulatory authority. In 2015, agriculture and related industries contributed nearly \$1 trillion to the U.S. GDP and in 2016, more than 21 million Americans were employed either full- or part-time in the agricultural and food sectors. Roughly every five years, Congress reviews agriculture policies through consideration of an omnibus bill known as the "Farm Bill." As Congress prepares for this task, we review in our latest Basic, "Let's Eat: The 2018 Farm Bill," what the farm bill is and how it impacts the lives of Americans.

What is the Farm Bill?

The farm bill is an omnibus agricultural bill that governs a wide array of agricultural, food, and conservation issues, as well as programs administered by the United States Department of Agriculture and its agencies. The farm bill is scheduled to be reauthorized every five years, to provide consistency and stability as lawmakers make periodic, comprehensive changes to programs that affect millions. However, as reauthorization is subject to congressional authorization, lapses have occurred. This was the case in 2012 when a two-year lapse in reauthorization occurred, and a bill was not signed until 2014.

The first farm bill was passed during the Great Depression in the 1930s. President Roosevelt's famous Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) was passed to provide relief to struggling farmers. The AAA and many other early farm bills focused on supporting farm commodity programs for products such as corn, soybeans, wheat, cotton, rice, dairy, and sugar. As farm bills grew larger and more encompassing, funding for programs related to nutrition assistance, conservation, and bioenergy have all been added.

The omnibus nature of the farm bill leads to fierce competition for resources and funds, as well as intense lobbying efforts by various coalitions presented with the opportunity to shape policy.

Farm Bill Jurisdiction

Not all programs addressed in the farm bill are the same. Some programs are mandatory and others are discretionary. Some programs can be revised through the farm bill process, but receive their funding through the regular appropriations process. In addition to standard programs such as commodity management, food and nutrition programs, providing insurance policies, and funding trade agreements, the farm bill also administers funding and programs that many might not expect. The farm bill provides money for salmon conservation in the Pacific

Key Statistics

- Total Number of Farms in the United States: **2,048,000**
- One **U.S. farm feeds 165 people** annually in the U.S. and abroad
- Share of U.S. household consumer expenditures by major categories, 2016:
 - Housing **33.0%**
 - Transportation **15.8%**
 - Food **12.6%**
 - Personal Ins./Pensions **11.9%**
 - Other **26.6%**
- Exports of Agricultural Products, 2015: **\$133 billion**. The most important countries of destination were:
 - China
 - Canada
 - Mexico
- Imports of Agricultural Products, 2015: **\$113.5 billion**. The most important countries/regions of origin were:
 - Canada
 - European Union
 - Mexico
- Public/Private partnerships have ensured that **93% of U.S. households have access to broadband internet service** from a cable provider
- 2014 Farm Bill provided **\$1.1 billion** for investments in biofuels and the production of other renewable energies

Northwest and incentives for renewable energy production across the country. It also manages a [rural utilities loan program](#) to provide broadband service to areas that are underserved or lacking access entirely.

Each section of the farm bill is referred to as a "title." The 2014 farm bill contained twelve titles and their jurisdictional overlays are outlined below. You can read more about each title [HERE](#).

- **Title 1:** Commodities
- **Title 2:** Conservation
- **Title 3:** Trade
- **Title 4:** Nutrition
- **Title 5:** Credit
- **Title 6:** Rural Development
- **Title 7:** Research, Extension, and Related Matters
- **Title 8:** Forestry
- **Title 9:** Energy
- **Title 10:** Specialty Crops & Horticulture
- **Title 11:** Crop Insurance
- **Title 12:** Miscellaneous

2014 Farm Bill

The most recent farm bill, The Agricultural Act of 2014, expires in September of this year. It followed the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008. In 2012, Congress began drafting a new farm bill, but disagreements over the costs of food stamps and nutrition programs ultimately led to failure of passage. Congress then extended the 2008 bill until September of 2013. The Senate was able to secure passage of a farm bill in June of 2013, but the House failed to pass again. Two years late, The 2014 farm bill was signed into law on February 7, 2014.

As expiration nears, many expect the 2018 farm bill to increase the deficit significantly. Recent analysis by the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget (CRFB) concluded that, "[at the time of its passage, CBO estimated the 2014 farm bill would save \\$17 billion over ten years.](#)" Some lawmakers on the House Committee on Agriculture are now arguing that the 2014 bill saved more than originally anticipated, thus allowing for more cuts, but that same CRFB report states that while the House Ag Committee "claims that the 2014 farm bill saved \$100 billion, but there is little evidence that it saved much more than the \$17 billion originally projected by CBO." This brings us to the current state of debate.

2018 Outlook

On May 18, 2018 the House failed to pass the farm bill when roughly 30 members of the conservative Freedom Caucus voted no, demanding a vote on strict immigration policies be taken up before the farm bill legislation. Democrats unanimously opposed the legislation for a number of reasons, chiefly the Republican addition of what Democrats view as overly-burdensome work requirements for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients. In addition to SNAP, other programs of contention being debated include crop insurance and reforms to the sugar program.

Additional Resources

- Farm Bureau
 - [Fast Facts About Agriculture](#)
- House Committee on Agriculture Republicans
 - [Farm Bill](#)
- House Committee on Agriculture Democrats
 - [Farm Bill](#)
- House Committee on Budget Democrats
 - [The Farm Bill and the Budget: What You Need to Know](#)
- Statista
 - [U.S. Agriculture - Statistics and Facts](#)
- USDA
 - [Data](#)
- USDA - Economic Research Service
 - [Ag and Food Sectors and the Economy](#)

As previously mentioned, the current farm bill expires on September 30th, 2018. If a new bill is not signed into law by October 1st, 2018, program rules and spending levels automatically revert to existing statutory levels that remain in the U.S. code, many of which predate the 1950s. Obviously this would leave producers and consumers in a very precarious situation facing higher costs and shortages of resources across the board.

Unlike when the 2014 farm bill passed, the markets are now facing weaker commodity prices and lower farm income. While the White House has discussed desired changes to the SNAP program and some farm and energy subsidy programs, USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue has largely taken to the sidelines, allowing legislation to work through the committee process. The White House did support the House version that ultimately failed in May, though House leadership has stated that they will have a resolution before the end of summer before the September deadline.

Links to Other Resources

- AgriPulse — Lesson #1: Every farm bill is unique – the last one was a doozy
<https://www.agri-pulse.com/articles/8894-lesson-1-every-farm-bill-is-unique-the-last-one-was-a-doozy>
- Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget — Analysis of the President's FY 2019 Budget
<http://www.crfb.org/papers/analysis-presidents-fy-2019-budget>
- Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget — Did the Last Farm Bill Really Save \$100 Billion?
<http://www.crfb.org/blogs/did-last-farm-bill-really-save-100-billion>
- Congressional Research Service — Farm Bill Primer Series: A Guide to Omnibus Legislation on Agriculture and Food Programs
https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20180328_R44913_b81b5708d2b2ab88bb950ae7e04b864610cea7d9.pdf
- Congressional Research Service — What Is the Farm Bill?
<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RS22131.pdf>
- Farm Policy Facts — Farm Bill: A Short History and Summary
<https://www.farmpolicyfacts.org/farm-policy-history/>
- Food Research & Action Center — Farm Bill Primer
<http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/frac-farm-bill-primer.pdf>
- National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition— What Is The Farm Bill?
<http://sustainableagriculture.net/our-work/campaigns/fbcampaign/what-is-the-farm-bill/>
- The New York Times — U.S. Farm Bill
<https://www.nytimes.com/topic/subject/us-farm-bill>
- U.S. Department of Agriculture — The Farm Bill
<https://nifa.usda.gov/farm-bill>

- U.S. Department of Agriculture — 2018 Farm Bill & Legislative Principles
<https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2018-farm-bill-and-legislative-principles.pdf>