



# The 2025 Farm Bill: Challenges, Extensions, and Priorities

Center Forward Basics

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## Overview

The Farm Bill is a comprehensive, multiyear statute overseeing various agricultural and food initiatives. The previous Farm Bill's sections covered a spectrum of areas, including backing for farm commodity revenue, agricultural preservation, international trade and food aid, farm financing, research, rural progress, forestry, bioenergy, horticulture, and domestic nutritional support, U.S. food and energy production, land conservation, nutrition, and wellness programs. These are some of the many issues managed daily by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). USDA is one of the largest federal agencies with expansive oversight and regulatory authority. Generally refreshed approximately every five years, the Farm Bill furnishes a consistent platform for policymakers to tackle matters around agriculture and food. As Congress prepares for this task, we review in our latest Basic what the Farm Bill is and how it impacts the lives of Americans.

## What is the Farm Bill?

The Farm Bill wields substantial legal authority while also catering to a diverse range of interests. Covering aspects from agricultural subsidies and food regulations to environmental preservation and rural advancement, this legislation allocates both mandatory and discretionary funds to numerous routine programs. These programs' effects and influence span all societal groups and geographical areas.

The Farm Bill is scheduled to be reauthorized every five years to provide consistency and stability as lawmakers make periodic, comprehensive changes to programs affecting millions. This timing allows lawmakers to modernize programs to align with the prevailing market and economic conditions. Since the 1930s, eighteen iterations of the Farm Bill have come to pass. In the event of its expiration without a replacement or if Congress does not extend programs, all initiatives would revert to the 1949 bill. 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 Farm Bill remains enmeshed in political discussions and ideological deliberations over policies. As the Farm Bills grew larger and more encompassing, funding for programs related to nutrition assistance, conservation, and bioenergy has been added to address the market and economic challenges affecting agriculture within the United States and globally.

## Current Extensions & Implications

In December 2024, Congress enacted the American Relief Act of 2025, extending the 2018 Farm Bill for one year through September 30, 2025. This extension was a stopgap measure designed to avoid a government shutdown and provide

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Center Forward brings together members of Congress, not-for-profits, academic experts, trade associations, corporations and unions to find common ground. Our mission: to give centrist allies the information they need to craft common sense solutions, and provide those allies the support they need to turn those ideas into results.

In order to meet our challenges we need to put aside the partisan bickering that has gridlocked Washington and come together to find common sense solutions.

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short-term continuity to the agricultural sector amid economic uncertainty, inflationary pressures, and the aftermath of recent natural disasters. While the extension successfully averted immediate disruption, it left many stakeholders frustrated due to the lack of substantive policy reforms and selective funding allocations. Critically, the extension ensures continued support for major "baseline" programs such as the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs, which offer income support based on market and revenue conditions. It also retains funding for the Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC) program, which protects dairy producers from volatile price fluctuations. It also provides continued access to federal disaster assistance, an increasingly important tool as farmers face more frequent extreme weather events.

However, the extension failed to fund several key discretionary and mandatory programs without permanent baselines. These so-called "orphaned" programs were left out due to budgetary constraints and political disagreement over funding priorities. Among them are the Organic Certification Cost Share Program (OCCSP) and the Organic Data Initiative (ODI)—two initiatives supporting the rapidly growing organic farming sector.

The OCCSP helps defray the often-burdensome cost of organic certification, particularly for small and beginning farmers. Without this financial assistance, many producers may forgo certification, undermining the integrity and accessibility of organic products in the marketplace. Similarly, the defunding of the ODI, which collects and analyzes organic production and marketing data, threatens the transparency and research necessary to support data-driven policymaking in the organic sector. The lack of funding for these programs weakens institutional support for organic agriculture and raises broader concerns about equity, innovation, and sustainability in the U.S. food system. Many stakeholders argue that by sidelining these programs, the extension disproportionately impacts underserved farmers, including minority producers and those transitioning to sustainable or regenerative practices.

The gradual nature of the extension introduces a high degree of uncertainty into long-term farm planning. Without clarity on what will happen beyond the extension's expiration, farmers and ranchers face difficulty making investment decisions, securing loans, or committing to conservation and infrastructure projects, which require multi-year planning. This environment of legislative limbo diminishes confidence in federal agricultural policy and puts additional stress on an already strained rural economy. While the American Relief Act of 2025 succeeded in preserving the status quo for another year, it did so at the cost of momentum toward more forward-looking agricultural reform. It highlights the urgency for a full reauthorization of the Farm Bill to restore funding to neglected programs and modernize policy to reflect the evolving needs of U.S. agriculture in the 21st century.

## What's at Stake?

As Congress prepares to reauthorize the Farm Bill, several key policy areas are under scrutiny:

- **Conservation and Climate-Smart Agriculture**

Conservation programs, notably the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), have faced funding cuts in recent years. The 2025 reauthorization presents an opportunity to restore and enhance these programs to promote sustainable farming practices and address climate change. Advocates argue for increased investment to support farmers in adopting climate-smart practices and improving soil health.

- **Support for Small and Mid-Size Producers**

Nearly 90% of U.S. farms are small and mid-size, and they often struggle to access affordable financing and resources. The reauthorization discussions include proposals to strengthen support for these producers through programs like the Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach (FOTO) initiative. Enhancing access to capital and technical assistance is seen as vital for the survival and growth of these operations.

- **Farm Labor Reform**

A significant portion of the U.S. agricultural workforce lacks legal immigration status, creating challenges for farmers who rely on this labor. Proposals to reform the H-2A visa program and provide legal pathways for farmworkers are central to the reauthorization debates. Such reforms aim to ensure a stable and legal workforce while protecting workers' rights.

- **Organic Agriculture and Research**

The exclusion of funding for organic programs in the current extension has underscored the need for dedicated support for organic agriculture. Advocates are pushing for the inclusion of funding for programs like the Organic Certification Trade and Tracking Program (OCTT) and research initiatives to support the growth and integrity of the organic sector.

## 2025 Outlook

The 2025 Farm Bill stands at a critical juncture. The temporary extension passed in late 2024 may have bought time, but it did not resolve American agriculture's fundamental policy questions. Farmers, rural communities, and the food system at large are calling for a Farm Bill to restore funding to essential but neglected programs, expand support for sustainable practices, and foster greater inclusion of small, beginning, and historically underserved producers. Moreover, the legislation must balance economic security for producers with environmental stewardship and food security for consumers.

A failure to pass this Farm Bill on time has sweeping consequences that ripple through nearly every corner of the U.S. economy and society. For millions of low-income families, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which is reauthorized and funded through the Farm Bill, could face uncertainty or temporary disruptions. School lunch programs, food banks, and child nutrition initiatives also depend on Farm Bill funding, putting vulnerable populations, especially children, at risk of losing access to consistent meals. Additionally, conservation programs that support environmental sustainability efforts on private lands could lapse, stalling progress on climate resilience, clean water, and biodiversity preservation.

For farmers and ranchers, the consequences could be just as serious. Commodity programs, crop insurance subsidies, disaster relief, and rural development funding are all tied to the Farm Bill. Farmers lose vital support systems without its passage that help manage risk, stabilize markets, and secure loans, particularly critical during economic volatility or extreme weather events. Moreover, businesses across the food supply chain, from seed suppliers and processors to grocery retailers, rely on the stability and structure the Farm Bill provides. Inaction doesn't just slow progress; it creates confusion, halts investments, and undermines the security of America's food and agriculture systems.

While the path to passage remains politically fraught, stakeholders agree the stakes are too high for inaction. The choices made in the coming months will shape the food and agricultural policy landscape for years. Whether Congress can rise to the occasion will determine the well-being of U.S. agriculture and the resilience, sustainability, and equity of the nation's food system.

## Links to Other Resources

- NSAC – [Release: Budget Bill Steamrolls Farm Bill Future, Slashing Billions - National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition](#)
- The Nature Conservancy – [Farm Bill 2025 What's Next & Why It Matters](#)
- USDA – [Farm Bill Home](#)