

Farm Bill and Rural Communities

What is the Farm Bill and Why is it Important to Rural America?

The Farm Bill is a significant and complex package of federal legislation that is passed and signed into law every five years. Despite its name, the bill impacts far more than simply farmers and ranchers. Provisions of the bill include measures to keep grocery prices lower for every American, promote international trade, support a healthy environment and promote food security for the disadvantaged. There is even a provision for rural broadband infrastructure in the bill. The bill has about 12 different “titles” that address different kinds



of benefits to rural residents, including farmers and ranchers. The program helps connect food banks with produce, grains and protein to help millions of our neighbors afford food. It also keeps grocery prices down for everyday Americans, boosts rural infrastructure and fulfills a variety of functions.

The Farm Bill has 12 sections ...

1. **Commodities:** Price and income support for farmers who raise products such as dairy, sugar, corn, wheat and rice, including disaster assistance to help them weather uncertainty.
2. **Conservation:** Programs to help farmers implement natural resource conservation efforts on pasture, cropland and other working lands promote a healthier environment.
3. **Trade:** Food export subsidy programs and international food aid programs help farmers compete in the international economy, while benefiting the less fortunate.
4. **Nutrition:** Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and other nutritional programs help low-income families put healthy foods on the table. Every year 40 million individuals and families receive support through these programs to keep our nation healthy.
5. **Credit:** Federal loan programs help farmers access capital to grow and sustain their farming operations.
6. **Rural Development:** Business and community development programs such as rural housing and infrastructure – including broadband – help to foster growth and economic development in rural communities. Nationwide, 11 million of the 14.5 million American lacking access to broadband at certain speeds live in rural America.

7. **Research, Extension and Related Matters:** Farm and food research, education and extension programs support farming industries and rural communities, while also providing critical training for the next generations of farmers and ranchers.
8. **Forestry:** Natural resources are crucial to the economic health of rural communities. The Farm Bill includes forest-specific conservation programs that help farmers and rural communities as stewards of those resources.
9. **Energy:** Programs in the Farm Bill encourage farmers to grow and process biofuel crops – helping farmers, ranchers and business owners install renewable energy systems – as well as supporting energy-related research.
10. **Horticulture:** Farmers markets and local food programs – as well as research and infrastructure for fruits, vegetables and other horticultural crops – are supported by the Farm Bill. Organic farming and certification programs also are funded under this provision.
11. **Crop Insurance:** Farming is a volatile business and one year of bad weather, or a natural disaster, can spell the end of many food producers. Crop insurance protects farmers from losses in yield, crop revenue or even whole farm revenue when the unforeseen strikes.
12. **Miscellaneous:** Numerous other programs are covered by the Farm Bill that include helping the beginning, socially disadvantaged and veteran farmers and ranchers; improving agricultural labor safety; workforce development; and promoting livestock health. These items help new farmers enter the market, as well as training the workforce they need to help them work the land. These initiatives create and support jobs and business opportunities in our rural communities.



What happens if it does not pass?

The current Farm Bill has been extended so that provisions will remain unchanged until Sep. 30, 2024.

Right now, the Senate and House are writing versions of a new Farm Bill within their respective agricultural committees, to take effect after the current legislation expires. Absent passage, there is potential for mixed results, including the following:

- **Some Provisions Continue:** Programs funded through federal appropriations – such as SNAP and federal crop insurance – continue without a current Farm Bill;
- **Evolving Programs Take Prior Form:** Some programs have been amended from their original form over time and – without reauthorization – would revert back to the original laws that created those programs, taking them back to their original forms (such as crop insurance), which often are inadequate in today’s environment; and
- **Some Programs Stall:** Items mandatorily funded by the Farm Bill stop once funds are depleted. These include crop subsidy and dairy support programs expire end of the year, raising milk costs, some agricultural research and farm-to-food bank assistance.