

Farm Bill Passes the Senate

Posted By [Keith Good](#) On February 5, 2014

[David Rogers](#) reported yesterday at Politico that, “The long-tortured farm bill [cleared Congress on Tuesday](#), ending a two year struggle that split the old farm-food coalition as never before and **dramatized the growing isolation of agriculture and rural America** in an ever more urban House.

“Written off as dead just months ago, the giant five-year measure won final approval from the Senate on [a 68-32 roll call](#) and goes next to President **Barack Obama** for his signature.

“Throughout the whole drama, Obama has remained remarkably detached, an almost bit player. But Agriculture Secretary **Tom Vilsack** and his deputy **Krysta Harden** will move to center stage now as they try to put the pieces in place before spring plantings, just weeks away in some regions of the South.”

Yesterday’s article noted that, “‘Today’s action will allow the proud men and women who feed millions around the world to invest confidently in the future,’ Vilsack said [in a statement](#) released after the Senate vote. ‘This legislation is important to the entire nation.’”

“Obama himself [sounded the same note](#), saying the bill will add ‘certainty’ for farmers and ranchers and includes ‘a variety of commonsense reforms that my Administration has consistently called for.’”

Also note that [David Shepardson and Marisa Schultz](#) reported yesterday at The Detroit News Online that, “President **Barack Obama** will **visit Michigan State University on Friday to sign the \$956 billion farm bill and highlight agriculture’s importance to the economy** after it received Senate approval Tuesday, the White House confirmed.

“Obama is expected to see MSU agricultural research in action and deliver a speech about how agriculture creates jobs and feeds the country before signing the legislation, according to the White House.”

Meanwhile, in yesterday’s Politico article, David Rogers noted that, “Just hours before the Senate vote, in fact, the Congressional Budget Office released new projections that show a big spike from what CBO had previously predicted for Commodity Credit Corporation outlays over the coming years.

“The new CCC estimates are not based on the commodity title in the new farm bill, which will be fully scored by CBO as part of its March baseline. But the added costs are substantial and come enough from like-minded farm programs that are a harbinger of the volatility ahead.”

Yesterday’s article added that, “**Vilsack has designated deputy secretary Harden to take the lead in overseeing implementation of the new bill**, and working groups have already been established in the department to try to prioritize what segments must move first.

“In the commodity title, the multitude of changes pose a real challenge given the short window before farmers must sign up for programs this spring.”

[Ed O’Keefe](#) reported in today’s Washington Post that, “After almost **four years** of intense negotiations between Democrats and Republicans, the package was formally introduced and passed by Congress in one week.”

[Ramsey Cox and Erik Wasson](#) reported yesterday at The Hill’s Floor Action Blog that, “Conferees settled on cutting SNAP by \$8 billion by requiring households to receive at least **\$20** per year in home heating assistance before they automatically qualify for food stamps, instead of the **\$1** threshold now in place in some states.”

“Some Democrats opposed any cuts to food stamps, which is why Sens. **Elizabeth Warren** (D-Mass.), **Ed Markey** (D-Mass.), **Richard Blumenthal** (D-Conn.), **Bob Casey** (D-Pa.), **Kirsten Gillibrand** (D-N.Y.), **Jack Reed** (D-R.I.), **Sheldon**

Whitehouse (D-R.I.), **Chris Murphy** (D-Conn.) and **Cory Booker** (D-N.J.) opposed final passage,” The Hill update said.

DTN Ag Policy Editor [Chris Clayton](#) reported yesterday that, “The farm bill also **satisfies most farm groups** by beefing up the crop insurance programs and giving producers an option to choose a main commodity safety net that likely will depend on regional commodity choices.”

Mr. Clayton noted that, “Sen. **Mike Johanns**, R-Neb., was a critic of the new target price program known as Price Loss Coverage, which he and other Midwest lawmakers argued would distort planting decisions. Still, Johanns voted for the bill, citing that it will streamline and consolidate conservation programs, an effort he promoted as U.S. secretary of agriculture under then-President George W. Bush. Johanns also noted the bill eliminates Direct Payments.

““At the end of the day, this constitutes a hard-fought compromise, and while no one got everything they wanted, **this bill warrants our support**,” [Johanns said](#).”

[Kristina Peterson](#) reported yesterday at The Wall Street Journal Online that, “A sense that the clock was running—an extension of the 2008 bill lapsed in September—and a grinding effort to resolve the thicket of regional issues helped the bill win enough support for passage. Often spotted chatting with Republican lawmakers on the Senate floor, Ms. Stabenow was known to chase them into the GOP cloakroom nearby to press issues.

“When the House voted on its farm bill last week, Ms. Stabenow went to the chamber with a list of lawmakers she wanted to talk to, Democratic aides said. Both she and Mr. Lucas, the House Agriculture chairman spent hours on the phone urging lawmakers to support the compromise measure.”

[Note that a **transcript** of the final floor debate on the Farm Bill conference report in the House is [available here](#), while a **transcript** of the floor debate in the Senate from Monday can be [found here](#)].

AP writer [Mary Clare Jalonick](#) reported yesterday that, “Conservatives remained unhappy with the bill.

““It’s mind-boggling, the sum of money that’s spent on farm subsidies, duplicative nutrition and development assistance programs, and special interest pet projects,” said Sen. **John McCain**, R-Ariz.”

And although he offered very modest and limited praise for the measure, Sen. **Jeff Flake** (R., Ariz.) also took a negative perspective of the Farm Bill on the floor yesterday, [related audio here](#) (MP3- 1:40).

The AP article indicated that, ““This bill will result in less food on the table for children, seniors and veterans who deserve better from this Congress, while corporations continue to receive guaranteed federal handouts,” Sen. **Kirsten Gillibrand**, D-N.Y., said. ‘I cannot vote for it.’

“Sen. **Charles Grassley**, R-Iowa, a longtime member of the Agriculture Committee, also voted against the bill. He cited provisions passed by the Senate and taken out of the final bill that would have reduced the number of people associated with one farm who can collect farm subsidies. Grassley has for years fought to lower subsidies to the wealthiest farmers.”

Sen. **Jim Inhofe** (R., Okla.) indicated in [press release](#) yesterday that, “I support Chairman Lucas’ important reforms to commodity programs for the benefit of our farmers and ranchers in Oklahoma and across the nation; however, I simply cannot support the lack of reforms to entitlement programs that Senate Democrats maintained in the farm bill conference report.”

Sen. **Tom Coburn** (R., Okla.), also voted against the Farm Bill conference report yesterday.

Sen. **Pat Roberts** (R., Kans.) indicated a [news release](#) yesterday that, “[Sen. Roberts] today voted against final passage of the 2014 Farm Bill conference report because it goes backwards towards protectionist subsidy programs, instead of forward with innovative and responsible solutions for producers and the taxpayer.”

Also yesterday, Reuters writer [Eric Beech](#) reported that, “‘This was hard fought. **It was as complex an effort as I have ever seen and I have been on the Agriculture Committee for close to 40 years,**’ Democratic Senator **Patrick Leahy** of Vermont [said](#).”

And Bloomberg writer [Alan Bjerga](#) indicated yesterday that, “**Final passage ends the agriculture community’s toughest legislative fight in almost two decades.**”

Video clips from some of the presentations regarding the Farm Bill on the Senate floor yesterday have been posted at [FarmPolicy.com](#) Online including: Assistant Majority Leader [Dick Durbin](#) (D., Ill.), Sens. [Sherrod Brown](#) (D., Ohio), [Michael Bennet](#) (D., Colo.), and [Mark Pryor](#) (D., Ark.).

Several Senators also released [statements or press updates](#) regarding the Farm Bill, including: [Kay Hagan](#) (D., N.C.), [Roy Blunt](#) (R., Mo.), [Bob Casey](#) (D., Pa.), [Joe Donnelly](#) (D., Ind.), [Jerry Moran](#) (R., Kans.), [John Thune](#) (R., S.D.), [Heidi Heitkamp](#) (D., N.D.), [Saxby Chambliss](#) (R., Ga.), [Tammy Baldwin](#) (D., Wis.), [Al Franken](#) (D., Minn.) and [John Hoeven](#) (R., N.D.).

Senate Ag Committee Ranking Member **Thad Cochran** (R., Miss.) [indicated yesterday](#) that, “The new farm bill sets an improved course for U.S. agriculture production, one that should make our farmers and ranchers more competitive as they supply the food and fiber that Americans and people throughout the world have come to rely on. I am pleased with the Senate’s strong support for a farm bill that achieves significant savings and addresses a variety of agriculture needs across the country.”

With respect to the House, Ag Committee Chairman **Frank Lucas** (R., Okla.) [indicated that](#), “I am pleased the Senate passed the conference report and put us another step closer to enacting a new farm bill. I commend Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Cochran on their efforts throughout this process.”

And Ag Committee Ranking Member **Collin Peterson** (D., Minn.) [noted yesterday](#) that, “The Senate today showed that it is possible to work together and actually get something done in Washington. Just as the House did last week, the Senate approved the 2014 Farm Bill with strong, bipartisan support, providing farmers and ranchers with a strong safety net and the certainty they need for the next five years. I commend Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Cochran for their unwavering support and urge the President to quickly sign the bill into law.”

Ranking Member Peterson also penned a recent column on the Farm Bill, “[Finally, a Farm Bill — and a good one at that.](#)”

The Washington Post [editorial board](#) opined today that, “The premise of the legislation — that this country would be at risk of shortages and soaring food prices without multiple layers of central planning in agriculture — is simply not true.”

Agricultural Economy

[David Pierson](#) reported yesterday at the Los Angeles Times Online that, “As California’s punishing drought drags on, ranchers are among the first to feel the pain.”

“Cattlemen and sheep farmers need winter rain to grow range grass. Without it, they have to depend on expensive feed, which delivers only a fraction of the nourishment provided by natural pastures.”

The article noted that, “Their struggle is a bellwether for California’s \$45-billion agriculture sector, a force responsible for filling the grocery aisles and pantries of the world. The Golden State produces nearly half of all U.S.-grown fruits, nuts and vegetables and is the nation’s leading dairy and wine producer.

“But dwindling water supplies are rousing anxieties in rural communities across the state. **Ranchers have begun liquidating herds.** Growers are considering **tearing out thirsty tree crops** such as nut orchards and citrus groves. And tens of thousands of additional acres of prime California soil could go unplanted if farmers don’t get enough water to irrigate them.”

An [update yesterday](#) from USDA indicated that, "Agriculture Secretary **Tom Vilsack** announced USDA will make \$20 million available for agricultural water conservation efforts throughout California to combat the effects of drought. Interested landowners and managers have until March 3, 2014 to apply for available funds."

And [Mike Lillis](#) reported yesterday at The Hill Online that, "House Minority Whip **Steny Hoyer** (D-Md.) said Tuesday he's 'not optimistic' that new foreign trade deals will pass through Congress this year.

"**President Obama** has made expanded trade authority a top priority of 2014, a position he emphasized in last week's State of the Union address. But Hoyer, the second-ranking House Democrat, said divisions in both parties would pose high hurdles to passage.

"Both parties have significant areas of concern with respect to trade promotion authority. I think there's a difficult path forward, if there is a path forward,' he said during a press briefing in the Capitol. 'I won't say I'm pessimistic, [but] I'm not optimistic. ... I just think it's a tougher road than I've seen before.'"

--

Keith Good
President
[FarmPolicy.com](#), Inc.
Champaign, IL

[FarmPolicy.com](#) is a FREE newsletter and is made possible by the generous support of [McLeod, Watkinson & Miller- Attorneys at Law](#).

To subscribe to the [FarmPolicy.com](#) Email, send a note to, farmpolicy-on@list.farmpolicy.com.

To unsubscribe, send a note to, farmpolicy-off@list.farmpolicy.com.

For instant updates, [follow me on twitter](#).