

Efforts Afoot To Get A Farm Bill Passed By The End Of September



DR. DARYLL E. RAY
Agricultural Economist
University of Tennessee



DR. HARWOOD D. SCHAFFER
Research Assistant Professor at
APAC, University of Tennessee

As a measure of the importance of the farm bill to agricultural producers, a large number of associations and coalitions representing commodity crops, livestock, dairy, specialty crops, state and local governments, minor crops, energy and bio-based product groups, farm cooperatives and financial groups, as well as the nation's two largest farm groups, the National Farmers Union and the American Farm Bureau Federation, groups with very different perspectives, have banded together to put pressure on Congress to pass the 2012 Farm Bill before the expiration of the current one at the end of September.

Yes, they want to pass a new farm bill by the end of September of this year. On Wednesday, August 22, 2012, these 39 farm groups announced their decision to form a coalition called Farm Bill Now.

In their announcement they worked to make it clear that the passage of a "farm bill" is not only in the interest of farmers and farm groups, it is in the interest of the whole nation and to people around the world who depend on imports of agricultural products from the US. They emphasized the fact that 1 in every 12 jobs is in the agriculture-related sector.

The farm bill deals with a wide variety of topics and includes programs from food and nutrition, to conservation, to rural development, to energy production, to expanding trade in non-

US markets. Every visit to a grocery store is a reflection of the importance of agricultural to the nation's health and well-being.

They note that this farm bill helps reduce the deficit when compared to the cost of prior farm bills.

Farm Bill Now seeks to show members of Congress that there is strong constituent support for a farm bill. To do this they are urging the public to contact their Congressional delegation and to persuade members to pass a new farm bill before the current bill expires.

These 39 groups are seeking to avoid a delay in the passage of the farm bill when Congress returns to DC after Labor Day especially since September will be a time when its members will have fall election campaigns on their minds.

On another front, the DTN Washington Insider discussed the efforts of several members of both parties to move farm legislation to the floor of the House. In July, the leadership of the House refused to bring farm legislation up for a vote because of the objections of some members who wanted to see the food and nutrition programs reduced further than they were in the Ag Committee.

The strategy being considered is to get 218 members of the House to sign a discharge petition that would bypass the ordinary procedures and bring the farm bill up for a vote by the House. Usually discharge petitions are used by the party in the minority, but in this case both parties have constituents who are farmers who could be hurt by a delay in adopting the farm bill.

Perhaps the combination of pressure from farmers and the broader public along with pressure from both sides of the aisle in the House will be able to bring about vote on the farm bill once Congress comes back into session in September. △

DR. DARYLL E. RAY: Blasingame Chair of Excellence in Agricultural Policy, Institute of Agriculture, University of Tennessee

DR. HARWOOD D. SCHAFFER: Research Assistant Professor at APAC, University of Tennessee