



Ag Weekly

What you need to know about
agriculture today

2018 Farm Bill advances from House Ag Committee

April 18, 2018

Source: Farm Futures

*Bill exposes disagreement between Democrats,
Republicans.*

The House Agriculture Committee today marked up HR2, the 2018 Farm Bill, and sent it to the full U.S. House of Representatives for consideration.

Rep. Frank Lucas, R-Oklahoma, asked his colleagues to vote to send the bill forward, even though many expressed disappointment in how the bill was written. Lucas, who chaired the House Agriculture Committee from 2011-15, said the farm bill never passed the committee in 1996. In 2014, 218 House members didn't support the farm bill, he said.

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"Let's move forward, let's keep working," Lucas said. "Let's get . . . to the next step."

The majority of committee members agreed with Lucas, voting to advance the bill from committee.

"Today's vote was about America's farmers and ranchers," said committee chairman Michael Conaway, R-Texas, in a statement. "It was about a better future and greater opportunities for SNAP recipients. It was about fulfilling an obligation to lead, rather than standing on the sidelines."

Partisan divide

The bill has exposed a partisan divide in the traditionally nonpartisan committee, with both sides trading barbs.

"I'm disappointed that my Democrat colleagues have turned their backs on America's heartland – that they've chosen partisan politics over the three years of bipartisan work in this committee," Conaway said. "Democrats halted talks over their objection to requiring work-capable adults to either find employment or receive free training for 20 hours per week."

Ranking member Collin Peterson, D-Minn., said the bill was flawed and the result of a "bad and nontransparent process."

"More than nine months ago, we began discussions on a bipartisan farm bill," Peterson said. "I saw this process as a way to work collaboratively and produce a work product where so many in this town have fallen victim to politics. We wanted to get to a bipartisan bill. In our discussions, we were able to find common ground on quite a few areas but, as anyone who has been through this before knows—and I've been through a few farm bills—nothing is agreed to until everything is agreed to."

He highlighted four areas of concern:

- Repeal of the broad-based categorical eligibility;
- Severing the link with the low-income home energy assistance program
- Creating a vast new state system of employment and training mandates
- Child support piece

"I didn't walk away. We didn't walk away. We were pushed away by an ideological fight I repeatedly warned the chairman not to start," Peterson said.

Rep. Rick Nolan, D-Minn., who served in Congress in the 1970s before returning to in the 2010s, said when he was in Congress in the 1970s, the committee process worked. Now, the committee members can't even work and collaborate on the things they agree upon. Members are shut out of the committee process, he said, robbing them of the ability to argue and persuade others of the merits of their ideas.

"Real democracy is a lot of hard work," Nolan said.

Rep. Dwight Evans, D-Penn., said no single party can write the farm bill alone.

Why include a work requirement?

Conaway includes a work requirement for people who receive a SNAP benefit. Under his proposal, most adults between 18 and 59 will need to work part time or enroll in 20 hours a week of workforce training in order to receive SNAP. The plan budgets \$1 billion per year to fund the proposal.

Nolan said the work provision is a good idea. Do you know the No. 1 reason people are unemployed? They can't pass a drug test. Second, they can't read and write. This issue should be dealt with in the labor committee, not the ag committee, he said.

Peterson agreed.

"There is not a single person in this room or my caucus that doesn't recognize and appreciate the role of work as a pathway out of poverty," he said. "What I can't support though is a waste of billions on a program that is entirely untested."

This bill will increase administrative burdens and kick thousands of working families out of SNAP, said Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass., while creating an untested and underfunded massive new bureaucracy.

"How could anybody in good conscience vote for this?" McGovern asked.

"I left today's markup with more questions than answers," said Rep. Lisa Blunt Rochester, D-Delaware. "I have serious concerns about the inflexible work requirements imposed on families receiving SNAP, the untested workforce training bureaucracy, and the cuts to conservation programs."

Rep. Ann Kuster, D-N.H., said she feels the bill is focused on “my people.” New Hampshire is third in the nation in deaths from drug overdoses and there are children going hungry because their parents are unable to work.

“This bill is cruel and I will not vote for it,” Kuster said.

What are ag groups saying about the bill?

“NCGA is pleased the bill restores full funding to the Market Access and Foreign Market Development Programs and makes administrative reforms to the revenue-based Agriculture Risk Coverage Program (ARC), which are welcome provisions for corn farmers facing uncertain times,” said North Dakota farmer Kevin Skunes, NCGA president. “NCGA also appreciates the bill's expansion of grower participation in working lands conservation programs and the research title's funding for the phenotyping initiative.”

“ASA continues to support completing the farm bill process as soon as possible this year to provide the long-term certainty farmers and ranchers need in the face of low farm prices and the volatile outlook for agricultural trade,” said ASA President John Heisdorffer, a soybean farmer from Keota, Iowa. “After today's committee action, we hope sufficient votes can be found to pass a bill on the House floor in the coming weeks. However, we are concerned by the absence of bipartisan support for the current bill, and encourage the House and committee leadership to work toward legislation that can receive the broad support that farm bills traditionally require.”

“So few amendments offered to such an important and wide-ranging bill can mean only one of two things: either members of the committee think it's near-perfect, or the House farm bill process is deeply troubled,” said Lindsey Lusher Shute, co-founder and executive director of National Young Farmers Coalition. “Failure to pass a farm bill this year would be a significant setback for young farmers. While Congress sits in its committee room arguing, young farmers are putting everything on the line to grow food for the nation. Farmers need members of Congress to back them up and support the programs that make a difference. We appreciate that the draft House bill addresses some of the challenges that young farmers now face, but it also eliminates programs that they rely on and further undermines their ability to compete.”

“The House Agriculture Committee had an opportunity to serve a spoonful of fairness into the sugar program, but failed to do so. The inaction is confounding,

considering the sugar program benefits only 13 sugar mega-processors, with zero benefit for American consumers,” said Jennifer Cummings, spokesperson for the Alliance for Fair Sugar Policy. “It’s time for the family farmer and the families that depend on manufacturing workers to be at the center of the conversation around agriculture policy in this country. We look forward to a robust floor debate so members of the House have an opportunity to modernize the sugar program.”

“The 2018 Farm Bill is ready for debate and amendments a mere six days after its introduction. A vote by the full House of Representatives is expected to soon follow. This is great news for farmers and ranchers everywhere. H.R. 2 – The Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018 - takes us one step closer to bringing certainty to families who face the toughest farm economy in more than a decade,” said AFBF President Zippy Duvall.

“The SCFBA (Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance) appreciates House Agriculture Committee Chairman Conaway for recognizing the importance of specialty crops in this initial legislation, which includes baseline funding of specialty crop programs included in the 2014 Farm Bill,” said Robert Guenther, Senior Vice President, United Fresh Produce Association. “However, the Alliance urges the House to enhance the bill by increasing the investment in specialty crop priorities -- such as fully funding the TASC program, increasing funding for the Specialty Crop Research Initiative and the Alliance’s policy recommendations throughout the bill.”

“This bill is wholly inadequate for providing family farmers with the resources they need to endure the worst decline in the farm economy in decades,” said NFU President Roger Johnson. “Congressional leadership’s directive to withhold any additional support has hamstrung the committee’s ability to address the six-year, 50% drop in net farm income. This bill lacks the improvements needed to provide sufficient farmer and consumer safety nets, it upends programs that improve sustainability, and it removes programs that aid the growth of fair and diverse markets for family farmers. Farmers Union is also deeply disappointed in the partisan nature of the House Farm Bill deliberations thus far. We urge members of Congress to make significant improvements to the bill prior to its passage.”

“Pork producers are pleased that the Agriculture Committee approved the 2018 Farm Bill,” said NPPC President Jim Heimerl, a pork producer from Johnstown, Ohio, and chairman of NPPC’s Farm Bill Policy Task Force. “We now need the full House to pass it soon and the Senate to follow suit. There are several very important provisions for pork producers in this legislation.”

Trade war with China could stunt Texas agriculture and economy

By John Austin

April 11, 2018

Source: The Item

AUSTIN — The prospect of a trade war with China may seem far off, but U.S. proposals to steeply raise tariffs on its goods, along with the Chinese response, could hit Texans close to home.

“There are some businesses in Texas which would benefit from the tariffs, namely those who produce goods that compete with Chinese imports, which will now be more expensive due to a tariff,” economist Ray Perryman wrote in an email. “For example, a steel manufacturer in Texas would theoretically benefit from the tariff on Chinese steel.

“On balance, however, there are far more losers than winners in a trade war and even those benefits would likely be minor and short-lived. A trade war with China would be a bad thing for the Texas economy.”

Voices in the Texas agricultural community are already speaking up in response to proposed tariffs from China, which could make products from the Lone Star State prohibitively expensive in an important market.



“The Texas Pork Producers Association is disappointed that China has placed an additional 25 percent tariff on U.S. pork exports,” according to an association statement. “Based on data from the most recent USDA Disposition, Production and Income report, hog marketing in Texas totaled \$191.2 million, from an inventory of 880,000 hogs, for the year ending December 2016.”

The Foreign Trade Division of the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that about \$16.3 billion in Texas merchandise was exported to China in 2017, Perryman said.

At about \$1.1 billion in products each year, agricultural commodities aren't Texas' largest export to China.

Oil and gas leads, with \$5.7 billion, followed by chemical exports totaling \$3.4 billion, \$1.7 billion in computer and electronic products and about \$1.3 billion in exported machinery.

Still, counting suppliers, producers, processors and handlers, Texas has about 6,900 jobs in various aspects of the pork industry, with an estimated \$373.6 million in personal income, plus \$546.4 million in gross state product, above and beyond the farm level, based on 2016 production and long-run prices.

"We recognize that the U.S. and China are negotiating, and we are hopeful that the 25 percent tariffs on U.S. pork will be short lived," according to the TPPA.

Thus far, Texans who work in agriculture feel "a lot of gratitude," toward President Donald Trump's efforts to roll back what they considered "intrusive" policies at the Environmental Protection Agency, Gene Hall, a spokesman for the Texas Farm Bureau, said.

Hall cited the 2015 Clean Water Act, which EPA Director Scott Pruitt acted to suspend earlier this year as a move that played well with Texas farmers and ranchers.

The act extended the EPA's reach to limiting pollution in smaller bodies of water, something farmers decried.

"The EPA thing is pretty big," in Texas agricultural circles, Hall said, and for

Trump to suffer significant political damage with such voters, the trade situation "would have to go seriously sideways."

But Hall said the escalation of protectionist tariff proposals is "a serious situation," given that "trade is our lifeblood in agriculture."

Texas produces 46 percent — nearly \$450 million annually — of the nation's cotton exports to China, according to Luis Ribera, an associate professor and extension economist at Texas A&M University's agricultural economics department.

A 25 percent Chinese tariff on Texas cotton could encourage nations such as Brazil and India to begin growing and selling more to the Chinese.

Something similar could happen with exported sorghum, worth \$209 million annually.

The experts stressed that the tariff proposals are as yet just that — proposals.

Still, as proposals escalate between the U.S. and China, Perryman said there are better and less disruptive ways of dealing with unfair trade practices.

"The more we threaten China, the more we risk a trade war which will do harm to both nations," Perryman wrote. "Texas is by far the largest exporting state in the country, and a trade war of any type would be extremely harmful. Trade wars have a way of spreading."

The importance of pollinators to soil and water conservation in Texas

April 12, 2018

Source: Southwest Farm Press



Pollinators include the birds and the bees (butterflies, bats, beetles, moths, and even small mammals) and are vital for production agriculture...

The Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board, Association of Texas Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association, and Texas Wildlife Association are joining other state agencies and organizations in a statewide campaign to highlight the importance of voluntary land stewardship in Texas. Soil and Water Stewardship Week is April 29 through May 6, 2018, and the focus this year is "The Importance of Pollinators to Soil and Water Conservation in Texas."

Pollinators include the birds and the bees (butterflies, bats, beetles, moths, and even small mammals) and are vital for production agriculture, our food supply, and the preservation of our natural resources. Many Texas farmers, ranchers, foresters, and urbanites recognize the importance of these insects and animals, and are attempting to regenerate pollinator populations by implementing voluntary conservation practices on private and public lands. Texans have been working with their local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) for over 75 years to voluntarily implement conservation practices that protect and enhance our soil and water resources.

Unfortunately, pollinator populations have been declining in the United States for several years, primarily due to loss of habitat. Thankfully there are many landowners in Texas that want pollinators on their property, and for good reasons. To begin with, pollinators are essential for productive agricultural ecosystems, such as row crop production and agro-forestry, and they ensure the production of fruit and seeds in many crops, grasses, and timber. Likewise, pollinators play a significant role in natural rangeland ecosystems by helping to keep plant communities healthy and reproducing, which in turn prevents soil erosion, improves water quality, and provides food and cover for native wildlife.

Soil and Water Conservation Districts are assisting producers to achieve their goal of regenerating pollinator populations by developing voluntary conservation plans. These conservation plans include the implementation of conservation practices that have the dual benefit of protecting natural resources and providing pollinator habitat. Such voluntary practices include riparian buffers, grassed waterways, planting native grasses and wildflowers, cover crops, pest management, and prescribed grazing.

Without healthy and productive rangeland, cropland, and forests, our pollinators will fail, production agriculture will fail, and our society will ultimately fail. Whether you're a farmer, a rancher, a forester, or just want to plant an urban flower garden, it is up to you to decide how to run your operation. We need pollinators, and we also need good stewards of our lands that protect and preserve the natural resources of Texas.

Partnering organizations in the "The Importance of Pollinators to Soil and Water Conservation in Texas" public awareness campaign includes Audubon Texas, Earthmoving Contractors Association of Texas, Independent Cattlemen's Association of Texas, San Antonio River Authority, South Texans' Property Rights Association, Texan by Nature, Texas Association of Dairymen, Texas A&M Forest Service, Texas A&M Natural Resources Institute, Texas Conservation Association for Water and Soil, Texas Grain and Feed Association, Texas Grazing Land Coalition, Texas Land Trust Council, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas Poultry Federation, Texas Seed Trade Association, Texas Sheep and Goat Raisers Association, Texas Water Resources Institute, U.S Rice Producers Association, and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Drones making a difference in agriculture research in Texas

By: Kay Ledbetter, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service

April 15, 2018

Source: Reporter News

Drones are being used more in agriculture research across the state.

In the Panhandle, the Texas A&M AgriLife Research dryland wheat variety nursery near Bushland is being monitored weekly by drone flights, offering wheat breeders a chance to see changes on a more real-time basis.



At College Station, Dr. Muthu Bagavathiannan, AgriLife weed

(Photo: Dr. Muthu Bagavathiannan/Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service)

scientist, is using drones to “read the weeds” at a research plot at Texas A&M.

“Our goal is to use advanced sensor technology to detect weeds from above the ground and implement precision weed management,” Bagavathiannan said.

The current practice is to have field scouts walk the large fields to look for weed issues, he explained. This is a tedious, time-consuming task that can be inaccurate, and bad weather conditions can prevent timely assessments of weed problems.

“But the UAV (unmanned aerial vehicle) technology would provide the ability to fly over large fields and collect reliable information in a short time period that can be directly relayed into actionable information,” Bagavathiannan said. “We need this technology to make that identification sooner than the naked eye can.”

Researchers are creating algorithms and indices that can one day be used by crop consultants to help producers identify weeds earlier, achieve greater control and use less chemical overall, thus be more economical and environmentally friendly.



Drones are being used to monitor weekly growth on the Texas A&M AgriLife Research wheat variety plots near Bushland. (Photo: Kay Ledbetter/Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service)

“Putting this information into the hands of a consultant will be more cost-effective, as they can fly multiple fields in a short time,” Bagavathiannan said.

At the Panhandle dryland wheat variety nursery, Dr. Jackie Rudd, AgriLife Research wheat breeder in Amarillo, said there are 5,000 plots to evaluate one at a time.

“Our normal process is to walk around here and go plot by plot and write in the book what we are getting,” he said. “This year we’ve had 16 flights over the plots using UAVs.”

The flights visually measure how fast the stand established in the fall, how well it did when the cold temperatures hit and the spring green-up.

To walk the dryland field takes three to four hours of walking and writing notes in the notebook, Rudd said. With the drone, it takes 10-15 minutes.

“It’s a big change from having to walk the field, although we are still doing that now to ground-truth and make sure everything the drones are recording is correct,” he said. “But I’m gaining more confidence in the drone information, and I think it’s going to give us efficiency and a lot more data to make our selections. We can see plant development through the year and adjust what groups of material we are going to focus on at harvest.”