

## Farm bill isn't just for farmers: it benefits consumers, too!

We learn in elementary school that food, water, air, clothing, and shelter are basic necessities of life. God provides the air and water we need while farmers use them, with soil, seeds and livestock to grow our food, timber for our houses, cotton and wool for our clothes.

Too often we take for granted that our grocery store shelves will always be full of high-quality food that is safe to eat. Some Americans may criticize the way food is grown in the U.S., but our food system is the envy of the world for its affordability and the

variety it offers. Fortunately, in America, the only time we see empty shelves is when we all rush at once to our local grocery to stock up on bread and other non-perishables when a big storm is forecast.

Fully stocked stores wouldn't be possible without an effective national farm policy. Every five years Congress writes a new farm bill. This legislation protects farmers when disasters hit and allows them to continue farming when commodity prices hit historic lows. Consumers benefit from the farm bill because it ensures the majority of our food is grown in the U.S., which strengthens our national security as other countries can't threaten to withhold food from us if a conflict arises. U.S. farmers and food processors also must adhere to stringent food safety regulations not required in many countries.

The 2014 farm bill runs through 2018, but Washington lawmakers are already preparing the next bill. About 80 percent of the farm bill is allocated to the nutrition title. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the food stamp program, is the largest segment of the nutrition title. This program offers nutrition assistance to millions of low-income Americans who must meet eligibility requirements. SNAP supplied about 44.2 million Americans with food assistance in fiscal year 2016 at a cost of \$70.9 billion. The nutrition title also funds the school lunch program and Women, Infants & Children program. Opponents of the farm bill love to target nutrition funding, but there is no denying that millions of Americans would go hungry without this assistance.

The commodity title of the farm bill, which accounts for about five percent of the bill's funding, addresses the production side of the equation. This part of the farm bill is important because it helps farmers survive market price downturns and overcome drought or extreme weather events that cause crop yield losses.

The commodity title of the farm bill also underwrites crop insurance farmers buy to protect themselves against possible farm losses due to a natural disaster. Private insurance companies cannot completely

underwrite crop insurance because the risk is too great. Like flood insurance for homeowners, crop insurance would not be available without government support because the risk makes it too expensive for the free market to provide without federal assistance. Crop insurance support accounts for eight percent of the farm bill.

The conservation title, another aspect of the farm bill, makes up about six percent of farm bill spending. It offers incentives and cost-share opportunities to landowners who participate in programs that protect the soil, water and wildlife on their land. Most of these programs are cost-share opportunities where the landowner contributes a significant portion of the project cost. The nonfarming public benefits from these conservation programs as this part of the farm bill funds projects that protect water quality, prevent soil erosion and provide wildlife habitats.

Farm bill opponents criticize it citing wasteful spending and abuse. It would be foolish to suggest there is absolutely no waste in such a massive bill, but eligibility safeguards are in place for nutrition and ag programs to thwart abuse.

The farm bill helps feed America's needy and assures farmers can stay in business to keep growing our food when natural disasters, like Hurricane Irma strike, or market prices fall below threshold prices Congress has deemed the minimum farmers must make to cover their costs of production.

The ultimate purpose of the farm bill is to assure our nation's food security. Domestic food production is a national security issue and reliance on foreign countries for our food supply is not a predicament we need to find ourselves in going forward.

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