



What is the “farm bill”?

Congress periodically passes an omnibus, multi-year farm bill addressing farm support, food assistance, agricultural trade, marketing, and rural development. Land conservation (primarily private) has been an increasingly important part of the legislation. The most recent farm bill, officially titled the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act, was passed in 2002 and expires in 2007. A new five-year farm bill is being developed by Congress. The House and Senate agriculture committees are taking the lead in crafting language for the bill.

The final farm bill essentially provides direction to agencies within the U.S. Department of Agriculture, including NRCS, ARS, CSREES, FS, APHIS, FSA, ERS, and NAL.

Farm Bill Structure

The farm bill comprises a number of chapters, referred to as “titles.” It is likely that the new farm bill will be structured similarly to the 2002 legislation which included the following titles:

- **Title I. Commodity Programs** – price supports, quotas, loan levels, etc.
- **Title II. Conservation** – incentive payments to farmers who adopt specified conservation practices on working lands; various programs (CSP, EQIP, CRP, etc.)
- **Title III. Trade** – foreign exports and subsidies, foreign food aid, etc.
- **Title IV. Nutrition Programs** – food stamp program, commodity supplemental food
- **Title V. Credit** – farm credit programs
- **Title VI. Rural Development** – ag market development grants, rural broadcasting, rural planning, water and sewer programs
- **Title VII. Research and Related Matters** – university research and state cooperative extension programs, focus on bioterrorism in 2002
- **Title VIII. Forestry** – sustainable private forest practices, local firefighting
- **Title IX. Energy** – bioenergy program, farmer loans for renewable energy systems, etc.
- **Title X. Miscellaneous** – country-of-origin labelling, animal health protection, outreach to disadvantaged farmers, biotechnology education...

The 2007 Farm Bill

Throughout 2006 the Secretary of Agriculture held hearings around the country to get feedback on farm bill programs. Reflecting that feedback, the USDA submitted to Congress its own proposal for the 2007 farm bill (see http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/!ut/p/_s.7_0_A/7_0_1OB?navid=FARM_BILL_FORUMS). Congress is not obliged to accept the USDA proposal, but at the least it will be seriously considered.

The tentative timeline for writing and passing the new farm bill legislation is:
Through April 2007 – Hearings, briefings, staff gather data from constituents
May 2007 – Congressional staff draft and finalize language (“chairman’s mark”)
June 2007 – Congressional committee review (“mark-up”)
July 2007 – Bill introduced on the floor
August 2007 – Conference committee hammers out differences
By Sept. 30, 2007 – Farm bill finalized and passed