



ACTION ALERT

TELL YOUR REPRESENTATIVES: WE NEED A NEW FARM BILL

With the April 18 farm bill deadline fast approaching and obstacles in the final negotiations, Congress may extend the current farm bill for 1-2 years. An extension of the current bill will result in significant losses for conservation, beginning farmers and ranchers, organic production and research, local food systems, nutrition assistance, and other important programs. As Members of Congress try to reconcile their differences, make sure they do their jobs and pass a new farm bill with our key gains intact!

CALL YOUR REPRESENTATIVE AND HOUSE SPEAKER PELOSI TODAY

Time is of the essence. Next week Congress will decide whether to work on passing a new bill or extend the current bill for 1-2 years. Call the offices of your Representative by calling the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and asking for your Representative's office. Also call House Speaker Nancy Pelosi at (202) 225-4965.

When you call, ask for the legislative aide who works on agriculture. If the agriculture aide is available, talk to him/her about your support for a new farm bill with big funding gains for nutrition, conservation, organic farming, etc. If the aide is unavailable, leave a short message of support, along with your name and phone number, on the aide's voice mail or with the receptionist. *Your Representatives do not have to be on the Conference Committee; every Representative needs to know that we need a new farm bill now. They may soon be voting on a new bill or on an extension of the old law.*

If you prefer to write, fax a brief letter of support, addressed to your Representative and also one to Speaker Pelosi, and remember to include your name and address and contact information. [Click here](#) for a list of fax numbers.

The message: I am calling to urge Representative _____ to help pass a new farm bill. Without a new bill, we lose the significant policy gains and funding increases for conservation, beginning farmer and ranchers, organic production and research, nutrition assistance, renewable energy, and local food systems. A 1 or 2 year extension of the current bill will eliminate these crucial gains and is unacceptable. Please ensure that the current farm bill is not extended and that a new farm bill is passed with these provisions

Background: A Glimpse of What We Lose with an Extension

Conservation: In the new farm bill we are poised to win \$4 billion in much-needed additional funding for conservation programs, including \$2 billion new dollars for the Conservation Stewardship Program (formerly Conservation Security Program), an innovative program that recognizes the multifunctionality of agriculture by supporting farming livelihoods through payments to farmers and ranchers for environmental enhancements and good stewardship, and \$2 billion for the Wetlands and Grasslands Reserve Programs.

Beginning Farmers and Ranchers: The new farm bill includes a substantial suite of policies aimed at supporting the next generation of farmers. A new grants program will target farm bill funds to training, mentoring and land link programs, interest rates for down payment loans will be as low as 1%, while 5% of funding in each conservation program is set aside for beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers (equating to tens of millions of dollars each year). To ensure oversight and coordination between all programs that address the needs of these farmers, the new farm bill creates a new Office on Small Farms and Beginning and Socially Disadvantaged Farmers at USDA reporting directly to the Secretary of Agriculture.

Organic Production and Research: The new farm bill includes much-needed additional funding to help organic farmers with their organic certification costs and the transition costs associated with three-year conversion from conventional to organic. The new farm bill also increases funding for organic research to *five times* the current level. It also takes significant steps toward improving crop insurance policies. This is a solid and important start to helping farmers keep up with demand for food that is produced organically.

Local and Regional Food Systems: There is more support in this new farm bill for local and regional food systems. Communities all over the country that want to start a farmers' market stand a better chance because the new bill is likely to include a seven-fold increase in funding to improve and expand farmers markets, roadside stands, CSAs, and other direct producer-to-consumer marketing opportunities. The bill includes a new loan guarantee program for food enterprises that help rebuild a local and regional food infrastructure. The Value-Added Producer Grants program is also expanded to include mid-tier value chains and local and regional food businesses.

Nutrition Assistance: The new farm bill includes a total \$9.5 billion increase for nutrition assistance, including food stamps (vital especially at a time of rapidly escalating food costs) and fresh fruits and vegetables for schools.

Renewable Energy: The new farm bill will also include a major new energy transition program to assist farmers who want to move into biomass production for cellulosic ethanol.

Still Major Fights Remaining on Structural Issues – Please Weigh In!

Details of the new farm bill are still being negotiated, including some important provisions that address the structure of agriculture. For more on commodity program reform and payment limitations, and for more on fair competition provisions for the livestock market, please look at and respond to our action alerts at www.sustainableagriculturecoalition.org on those topics.