

What is the Farm Bill and Why is it Important?

On April 18, the House Agriculture Committee passed its Farm Bill, H.R. 2, the “Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018”. The full legislative text of H.R. 2 is 641 pages. The Section-By-Section version (link attached at end of this article) is much more condensed and offers highlights of the legislation. The Bill passed the House Agriculture Committee and will now move to the full House which is expected to vote on the measure next month. The Bill will move through the Senate Agriculture Committee next and the Senate is expected to release its version in the next few weeks.

Passage of the House Bill is just one early step in a series of many steps that must be taken before a Farm Bill becomes law. The process can be confusing and therefore we hope to shed a little light on the process to make it a little easier to understand.

So you might ask, “What is the Farm Bill and why is it important?” The Farm Bill is an omnibus, multi-year law that governs an array of agricultural and food programs. An omnibus bill is a single document accepted in a single vote by Congress that packages together several measures into one or combines diverse subjects. Titles in the most recent farm bill encompassed farm commodity price and income supports, agricultural conservation, farm credit, trade, research, rural development, bioenergy, foreign food aid, and domestic nutrition assistance. Because it is renewed about every five years, the Farm Bill provides a predictable opportunity for policymakers to comprehensively and periodically address agricultural and food issues.

The current Farm Bill, the Agricultural Act of 2014, expires September 30, 2018. When a farm bill expires, not all programs are affected equally. Some programs cease to operate unless reauthorized, while others might continue to pay old obligations. The farm commodity programs not only expire but would revert to permanent law dating back to the 1940s. Nutrition assistance programs require periodic reauthorization, but appropriations can keep them operating. Many discretionary programs would lose statutory authority to receive appropriations, though annual appropriations could provide funding and implicit authorization. Other programs have permanent authority and do not need to be reauthorized. These permanent programs include LFP, LIP, ELAP, and TAP.

The second page of this article contains a flow chart that will serve as a guide to help NASCOE members understand the legislative process and how a bill becomes a law.

NASCOE’s Legislative Team is working hard for our members to stay informed and proactive as the 2018 Farm Bill process continues. We not only monitor Farm Bill issues, but other issues that affect membership such as benefits, annual appropriations and re-organization. NASCOE is proud to represent employees who want our customer service and program delivery to align with Secretary Perdue’s motto to “Do right and feed everyone” in a fiscally responsible manner to benefit our agricultural economy.

H.R. 2, Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2019, Section-By-Section:

https://agriculture.house.gov/uploadedfiles/agriculture_and_nutrition_act_of_2018_section_by_section.pdf



How a Bill Becomes a Law Flowchart

About 10,000 bills are introduced per year. Each is given a number and assigned to a committee. There are 22 committees in the House of Representatives and 15 committees in the Senate.

