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

BILL IS DRAFTED

Members of Congress, the Executive Branch, and even outside groups can draft (write or draw up) bills.

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.

HOUSE

Bill is introduced and assigned to a Committee which refers to a Subcommittee. Only members can introduce bills.

SUBCOMMITTEE

Members study the bill, hold hearings, and debate provisions. Marks up the bill. If it passes goes to Committee.

COMMITTEE

Full Committee considers the bill. If it approves the bill in some form, the bill goes to the Rules Committee.

RULES COMMITTEE

It issues a rule to govern debate on the floor. Sends it to the Full House.

FULL HOUSE

Debates the bill and may amend it. If it is different from the Senate version, it must go to a Conference Committee.

FULL HOUSE

Votes on bill, if it passes it goes to the President.

PRESIDENT

Can sign or veto the bill. Congress can override it by 2/3 majority vote in the House and Senate. President can sign the bill, veto it or do nothing.

SENATE

Bill is introduced and assigned to a Committee which refers to a Subcommittee.

SUBCOMMITTEE

Members study the bill, hold hearings, and debate provisions. Marks up the bill. If it passes goes to Committee.

COMMITTEE

Full Committee considers the bill. If it approves the bill in some form, the bill goes to the Rules Committee.

FULL SENATE

Debates the bill and may amend it. If it is different from the House version, it must go to a Conference Committee.

CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

Senators and Representatives meet to reconcile differences between bills. When agreement is reached, a compromise bill is sent to Full Senate.

FULL SENATE

Votes on bill, if passes it goes to the President.



Teacher Resource