

House Farm Bill Needs Much Work

Written by Elisha Smith
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By John Crabtree, johnc@cfra.org, Center for Rural Affairs

The House Agriculture Committee's draft farm bill is deeply disappointing.

It would make federal subsidies for crop insurance premiums the primary farm program, but impose no payment caps, no income limits for recipients and no conservation requirements. Mega farms would get unlimited subsidies to bid land away from small, mid-size and beginning farmers.

For traditional farm programs, the draft would increase the commodity payment limit by 250 percent above generous Senate-passed levels. Unlike the Senate bill, however, it would leave current loopholes that invite widespread farm program abuse wide open. It would also reduce acreage enrollment for the Conservation Stewardship Program by a staggering 30 percent at a time when record numbers of farmers are enrolling acres into the program.

But that's not all, this farm bill would remove restrictions on subsidies intended to protect native grasslands everywhere except one small region of the Northern Great Plains. It would slash investment in programs for beginning farmers and ranchers by half. It would cut investment in proven job-creating rural development initiatives by 88 percent.

The House's draft farm bill fails to deliver for family farmers and ranchers, rural communities and the natural environment. The Committee should address these deficiencies when they take up the bill this week and, failing that, all members of Congress should prepare to debate these

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crucial issues on the House floor if there is any hope that this farm bill will reflect rural America's values and invest in a better future for our rural communities and the people that live there.