



2012 Farm Bill – Fact or Fiction?

Investing more than \$5 billion a year in a suite of conservation programs, the current Farm Bill far exceeds other federal sources of conservation funding. Land trusts and local governments have leveraged working lands easement funding into millions of acres of permanently conserved agricultural lands. With your help, we're on the verge of securing a new Farm Bill that embraces the successful model of helping land trusts purchase perpetual conservation easements from willing landowners. These easements secure food and fiber, clean water, wildlife habitat, and our rural heritage – a good investment for future generations of farmers, ranchers, and all Americans.

Cause to Celebrate

The 2012 Farm Bill has been negotiated in a climate of unprecedented fiscal constraints with extraordinary pressure to reduce funding, consolidate programs or eliminate them altogether. Despite overall cuts ranging from \$23-35 billion, **we've been remarkably successful in securing at least level funding for Agricultural Land Easements.** This bill isn't yet a done deal, but here's a look at the common elements now approved by the full Senate and the House Agriculture Committee:

- **Strong funding** – Between **\$1.38 and \$1.58 billion** over the next decade. Amid widespread cuts, perpetual easements get **more** funding over the next five years than the last.
- **A merger that embraces land trust partnerships** -- The new Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) program merges the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) and Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), using the successful model of providing grants for land trusts to buy perpetual easements. Federal acquisitions and term easements are gone.
- **Successful amendments define the federal role** – The Senate unanimously adopted an amendment to clearly limit the federal role in the acquisition and stewardship of ALE easements. Thanks to the efforts of Congressmen Chris Gibson (R-NY), Scott Tipton (R-CO) and others, this and other important changes were included in the House draft.



- **Waiver for grasslands maintained** – Both bills allow USDA to pay up to 75% of appraised value for easements on grasslands of special significance.
- **Harmful amendments averted** – The Senate resoundingly defeated an amendment to eliminate Forest Legacy. None of the 100+ House amendments proposed further cuts to conservation.



These successes would not have been possible without the hard work of partners like Mesa Land Trust, which invited Senator Michael Bennet (D-CO) to meet the easement donors of C&R Farms. Bennet later championed our Senate amendments.

Economic Benefits from Farm Bill Programs

Is there a tie between conserved working landscapes and positive economic benefits to the surrounding communities? In a newly released publication funded by USDA/NRCS, **The Power of Leveraging Local and Federal Dollars to Strengthen Agricultural Land Easement Investments**, four case studies featuring FRPP projects from across the country illustrate a direct & quantifiable link. Download it at:

www.lta.org/policy/FRPPbenefits

Help Pass the 2012 Farm Bill Now

Celebration has turned to frustration as House leaders refuse to bring the Farm Bill to the floor for a vote. Some programs, including the Grassland Reserve Program, will grind to a halt as the 2008 Farm Bill expires on September 30th and a delay into 2013 would trigger new rounds of cuts.

To force action when Congress returns after the election, Representatives Bruce Braley (D-IA), Rick Berg (R-ND), Chris Gibson (R-NY), and Peter Welch (D-VT) have filed a "discharge petition" on the Farm Bill. If they are able to secure 218 signatures, it will force House leaders to call an immediate vote. Please urge your representative to pass the Farm Bill ASAP!

1. Call your rep (via 202-225-3121) and ask to speak with his or her agriculture staffer
2. Tell them how much these Farm Bill conservation programs matter to your land trust and the landowners in their district
3. Ask them to sign Rep. Braley's discharge petition and urge leadership to schedule a vote

What's Next?

The current Farm Bill expires on September 30th, and it does not appear that Congress will be able to address it until December at the earliest. That means:

- Until there is further Congressional action, no new acres can be added to the Grassland Reserve Program, the Wetland Reserve Program, or the Conservation Reserve Program. Thanks to a 2011 budget deal, the Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program will be able to continue in 2013 and 2014, at \$150 million a year.
- In December, we will urge the House to pass the bill that its Agriculture Committee advanced by a bipartisan vote of 35-11. Failure to do so would likely result in a short-term extension that could put conservation funding in great peril.
- At every opportunity, we will continue to be guided by the consensus priorities identified by land trusts in *Land Trust Proposals for the 2012 Farm Bill*: www.lta.org/policy/fb-proposals.
- Whenever Congress eventually passes a Farm Bill we'll need your help on rulemaking, to make sure it is as easy as possible for land trusts to participate in its conservation programs.

Learn More and Get Involved

SEND A MESSAGE TO CONGRESS

Visit www.farmbillnow.com to sign a petition, send a tweet, and post on your rep's Facebook wall.

SUBSCRIBE

Join our email list for land trust leaders who want the inside scoop on farm bill by emailing policy@lta.org.

VISIT

Our Farm Bill webpage at www.lta.org/farmbill has program information and tips for getting involved.