



House Farm Bill – Backward Steps for Wildlife

The House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture has passed a Farm Bill that will be devastating for the environment. The bill shortchanges conservation by more than \$6 billion dollars while expanding insurance and price support programs that will encourage even more habitat destruction on lands poorly suited to produce food for America. The bill also fails to contain crucial conservation compliance measures which provide modest protections for soil, water and wildlife. Moreover, the bill contains unacceptable extraneous provisions including ones that will allow pesticides to harm endangered animals and plants and pollute our waterways and that will facilitate extensive logging in our national forests. The following is a quick summary of the most problematic provisions of the House Committee bill.

Funding Cuts for Conservation

1. Conservation funding has been cut by more than \$6 billion, with the steepest cuts to the Conservation Reserve Program, likely resulting in at least 5 million acres of grassland, stream buffers and wetland habitat coming out of the program and going under the plow.
2. A dedicated source of funding for wildlife (the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program) is eliminated in both the Senate and House bills but the Senate creates opportunity for wildlife funding through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) with a minimum 5 percent of program funding going to wildlife. The House makes this set aside for wildlife a 5 percent maximum, meaning that many farmers with wildlife projects will likely be turned away.

More Subsidies with Fewer Public Benefits

3. Annual taxpayer subsidies that fund crop insurance companies and farmers' insurance premiums have already gone up by \$6 billion over the last decadeⁱ. The Agriculture Committee proposes another \$9 billion increase which is structured in ways that make the taxpayer bear the risk while encouraging farmers to plow fragile lands that are poorly suited to food production.
4. Farmers and taxpayers have had a deal on the environment for more than 25 years. Called 'Conservation compliance,' taxpayers provide subsidy support in exchange for farmers providing modest protections for soil, water and wildlife on approximately 500 million acres of farmland. The Agriculture Committee chose to ignore the Senate's extension of this compact that recent polls show has the support of the majority of farmers themselves.
5. A limited version of conservation compliance called 'sodsaver' was also rejected by the Agriculture Committee despite strong support from hunters and fishermen, environmentalists, the ethanol industry and National Farmers Union. This provision would have made farmers who plow up wetlands or the less than 1 percent of virgin prairie remaining in America ineligible for crop insurance for just five years. Even this moderate penalty failed to pass the Committee, despite evidence that compliance provisions have been successfulⁱⁱ and provide a net economic benefit.ⁱⁱⁱ

Increased Use and Impacts of Pesticides

6. The Committee tilts an already tilted playing field further toward industrial agriculture. It eliminates dedicated support to help farmers use less pesticide and go organic by repealing the National Organic Certification Cost Share program, reduces funding for organic research and maintains barriers that impede organic farmers' efforts to insure their crops.
7. Section 10017 of the House farm bill axes certain Clean Water Act protections that will result in the direct application of pesticides into streams and rivers without any oversight. The Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) – the law under which pesticides are registered – does not require tracking of such pesticide applications.
8. Section 10016 of the House farm bill puts the interests of pesticide manufacturers ahead of the health of our wildlife and communities. This section prescribes non-science based roadblocks and delays for measures recommended by federal wildlife experts to protect endangered species from pesticides. This spells disaster for species already on the brink of extinction because of pesticides and other threats.

Renewable Energy and Energy Conservation Zeroed Out

9. No support is provided for renewable energy, eliminating what were highly successful programs to help capture methane emissions from dairies and feedlots, energy audits, and other programs that have helped thousands of farms reduce energy bills and fossil fuel use and switch to renewable energy sources.

Increased Logging in Our National Forests

10. Several more changes to forest policy (Sections 8301 – 8304) would exploit the danger of wildfires and harmful pests to allow extensive logging in designated “critical areas” that could cover more than 15% of our national forests with almost no environmental review or public involvement.

Limiting States' Ability to Protect Food Supply and the Environment

11. An amendment from Representative King (R-IA) that passed the Committee would have broad impacts on states' ability to regulate agricultural products to protect the local environment. State laws, such as ones in California requiring businesses to notify consumers about chemicals in the products they purchase, would be pre-empted by this language, as would Maryland's ban on the use or sale of arsenic in commercial poultry food. Other states, including New York, have restrictions to stop the spread of invasive pests that can devastate local forests and these restrictions would also be subject to this language.

Where to go from Here?

It is unclear when the full House of Representatives will take up the Committee Farm Bill. If the bill does make it to the floor, restoring balance to the Committee's bill will depend upon bipartisan support for amendments from Members and House leadership.

ⁱ Environmental Working Group. 2012. 2012 Farm Bill: Crop Insurance – The Secret, Flawed & Expensive Safety Net. Accessed at <http://www.ewg.org/agmag/2012/04/2012-farm-bill-crop-insurance-the-new-subsidy/> on July 12, 2012.

ⁱⁱ Claassen, Roger. *The Future of Environmental Compliance Incentives in U.S. Agriculture: The Role of Commodity, Conservation, and Crop Insurance Programs*, EIB-94, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, March 2012.

ⁱⁱⁱ National Center for Environmental Economics. 2012. Highly Erodible Land Conservation Compliance and “Sodbuster.” U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.