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Farm Bills: Major Legislative Actions, 1965-2018

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Summary

The farm bill provides an opportunity for Congress to address agricultural and food issues comprehensively about every five years. Over time, farm bills have tended to become more complicated and politically sensitive. As a result, the timeline for reauthorization has become less certain, and in general recent farm bills have taken longer to enact than in previous decades. Recent farm bills, beginning with the 2008 farm bill (P.L. 110-246), have been subject to various developments that have delayed enactment, such as insufficient votes to pass the House floor, presidential vetoes, and short-term extensions.

The 2014 farm bill took more than 21 months from introduction to enactment and spanned the 112th and 113th Congresses. The House rejected a bill in 2013 and then passed separate farm and nutrition assistance components before procedurally recombining them for conference with the Senate. Somewhat similarly, the 2008 farm bill took more than a year to enact and was complicated by revenue provisions from another committee of jurisdiction, temporary extensions, and vetoes.

Whether the House or Senate proceeds first in committee or on the floor is also not always predictable. Both the 2008 farm bill and the 2002 farm bill were extended before their successors were enacted.

In 2018, a farm bill reauthorization was reported from the House Agriculture Committee on April 18 (H.R. 2). An initial floor vote on passage on May 18 failed in the House 198-213, but floor procedures allow that vote to be reconsidered through the legislative day of June 22, 2018 (H.Res. 905). The Senate has not yet marked up its bill.

This report examines the major legislative milestones for the last 11 farm bills covering 53 years and illustrates trends that may provide useful background and context as the current farm bill debate proceeds.

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The farm bill provides an opportunity for Congress to address agricultural and food issues comprehensively about every five years.¹ Over time, farm bills have tended to become more complicated and politically sensitive. This has made the timeline for reauthorization less certain, and modern farm bills have taken longer to enact than in previous decades. Recent farm bills have been subject to developments that have delayed enactment, such as insufficient votes to pass the House floor, presidential vetoes, and short-term extensions.

For example, the 1973 farm bill was enacted less than three months after being introduced. In contrast, the 2014 farm bill took more than 21 months from introduction to enactment, spanning the 112th and 113th Congresses.² The House rejected a bill in 2013 and then passed separate farm and nutrition assistance components—the first time a chamber-passed farm bill reauthorization did not include a nutrition title since nutrition became part of the farm bill in 1973. The House later procedurally recombined them for conference with the Senate. Somewhat similarly, the 2008 farm bill took more than a year to enact and was complicated by revenue provisions from other committees of jurisdiction, temporary extensions, and vetoes.

Both the 2002 and 2008 farm bills had expired for about three months (from October through December in 2007 and 2012) before extensions were enacted. In each case, the fiscal year began under a continuing resolution for appropriations. The extensions of the 2002 farm bill were for relatively short periods totaling about five months during final House-Senate negotiations. However, the extension of the 2008 farm bill in 2013 was for a full year, since the 112th Congress had ended and it was necessary to reintroduce farm bill legislation in the 113th Congress.

In 2018, a farm bill reauthorization was reported from the House Agriculture Committee on April 18 (H.R. 2). An initial floor vote on passage on May 18 failed in the House 198-213, but procedures allow that vote to be reconsidered through the legislative day of June 22, 2018 (H.Res. 905). The Senate has not yet marked up its bill.

This report examines the major legislative milestones for the last 11 farm bills over 53 years, a period representing modern farm bills with growing complexity. It discusses trends that may provide historical perspective as the current farm bill debate proceeds. **Table 1** contains a history of major legislative action on farm bills since 1965. **Figure 1** shows the dates on a timeline for each farm bill from introduction to enactment. The consequences of expiration of a farm bill,³ as well as its content, are discussed in other CRS reports.⁴

Timelines for Enactment, Extension, and Vetoes

Parts of a farm bill are authorized for a period of fiscal years and therefore expire at the end of the fiscal year (September 30) in the year of the farm bill's expiration. Other parts are authorized for crop years or calendar years. The 2014 farm bill (the Agricultural Act of 2014, P.L. 113-79) generally expires at the end of FY2018 and with the 2018 crop year, which for dairy is the end of the calendar year.

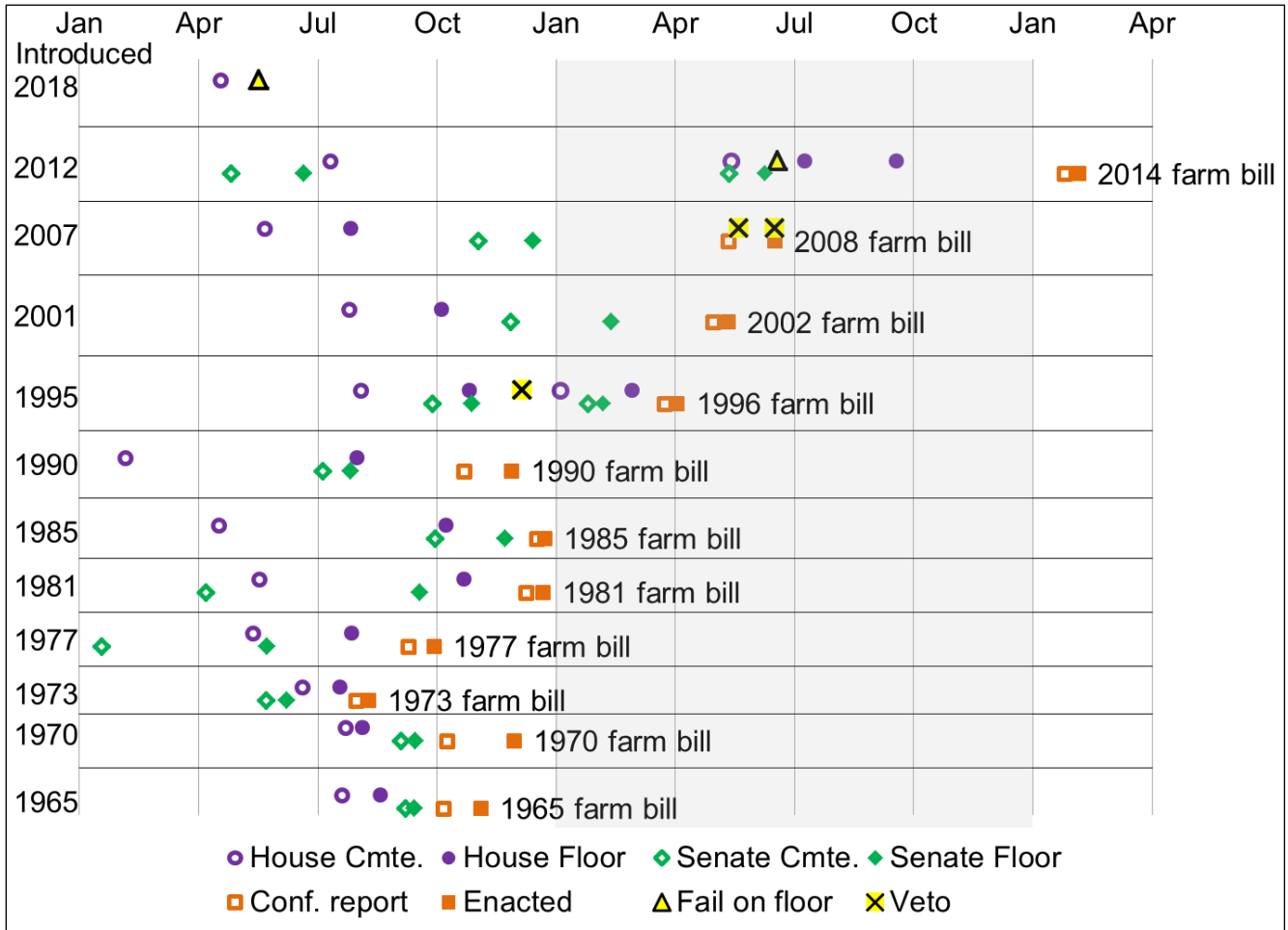
¹ See CRS In Focus IF10187, *Farm Bill Primer: What Is the Farm Bill?*

² These dates span only the official introduction of a bill marked up by committee until the President signed the bill. They do not include background hearings before committee markup, which would extend the timeline.

³ For example, expiration of the 2008 farm bill as the 2014 farm bill was being developed is discussed in CRS Report R42442, *Expiration and Extension of the 2008 Farm Bill*.

⁴ See CRS Report R45197, *The House Agriculture Committee's 2018 Farm Bill (H.R. 2): A Side-by-Side Comparison with Current Law*; and CRS Report R44913, *Farm Bill Primer Series: A Guide to Omnibus Legislation on Agriculture and Food Programs*.

Figure I. Major Legislative Actions on Farm Bills, 2018-1965



Source: CRS, using <http://www.congress.gov>.

Note: In 2018, the initial floor vote on passage of H.R. 2 failed in the House, but procedures allow that vote to be reconsidered through the legislative day of June 22, 2018 (H.Res. 905).

Timeline Relative to Fiscal Years

Enacting farm bills after the end of the fiscal year (in which a farm bill expired) is commonplace. In the past 53 years, only the 1973 and 1977 farm bills were enacted before the September 30 expiration date for most programs.

Timeline Relative to Calendar Years

Farm bills in 1965, 1970, 1981, 1985, and 1990 were enacted by December 31—within three months of the end of the fiscal year but before spring-planted crops that would be covered by the new law were planted. The most recent four farm bills (1996, 2002, 2008, and 2014) have been enacted later in the year—in April (1996), May (2002), June (2008), and February (2014)—but still prior to the first crop covered by the farm bill was harvested.

Timeline Relative to the Two-Year Congress

Since 1965, eight out of 11 enacted farm bills were *introduced* in the first session of a two-year Congress (the odd-numbered year); the exceptions are the 1970, 1990, and 2014 farm bills.⁵ The 2014 farm bill, which was introduced in 2012, was the first to start in one Congress, remain unfinished, and require reintroduction in a subsequent Congress. *Enactment* of the past five farm bills (1990-2014) have been in the second session (the even-numbered year), although, except for the 1990 farm bill, some action had occurred in the prior year. Only the 1970 and 1990 farm bills were enacted after an election during a lame duck Congress in late November.

House or Senate Action First

The House and Senate have taken turns in initiating action on a farm bill. Since 1965, the Senate was first to mark up farm bills in 1973, 1977, 1981, 2012, and 2013. The House was first to mark up bills in 1965, 1970, 1985, 1990, 1995 (and 1996), 2001, 2007, and 2018.

Short-Term Extensions

Extensions of a prior farm bill while its successor is being written have been atypical, though the past two reauthorizations have involved extensions. Only the 2002 and 2008 farm bills have required extensions in 2007-2008 and 2013, respectively, as their successors were being written.⁶

When the 2002 farm bill expired, portions of it were extended six times for less than a year total beginning in December 2007. The first of those extensions continued authority for many expiring programs for about three months.⁷ Because final agreement was pending, five more extensions—ranging from a week to a month—were needed. With a few exceptions, these extensions continued all 2002 farm bill provisions that were in effect on September 30, 2007. Dairy and sugar programs were included, as were price support loan programs for wool and mohair. But the direct, counter-cyclical, and marketing loan programs for the 2008 crop year for all other supported commodities (i.e., the primary supported commodities such as feed grains, oilseeds, wheat, rice, cotton, and peanuts) were specifically *not* extended.⁸ Moreover, the first extension in December 2007 did not address permanent law, but the second and subsequent extensions in 2008 did extend the 2002 farm bill's suspension of permanent law.⁹

⁵ Technically, the bill that became the 2014 farm bill (H.R. 2642) was introduced in 2013 (the first session of the 113th Congress), but many observers consider it a reintroduction of the bills started in 2012.

⁶ The 1965 farm bill was extended for one year, but that extension occurred more than a year before expiration and before the reauthorization process had begun in 1970. The 1996 and 2002 farm bills may appear to have been delayed by being reintroduced (1996) or going through the new year into May (2002), but their predecessors did not require extensions. Writing the 1996 farm bill was not pressured by the 1990 farm bill's original expiration date of the 1995 crop year because budget reconciliation in 1993 had extended the farm commodity programs through at least 1996 and, in some cases, the 1997 crops. Writing the 2002 farm bill was not pressured because the 1996 farm bill was to be effective until September 30, 2002, and through the 2002 crop year. In fact, the 2002 farm bill superseded the last year of the 1996 farm bill by beginning with the 2002 crop year.

⁷ "Except as otherwise provided in this Act ... authorities provided under the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 ... (and for mandatory programs at such funding levels), as in effect on September 30, 2007, shall continue, and the Secretary of Agriculture shall carry out the authorities, until March 15, 2008." P.L. 110-161, §751.

⁸ Other programs that were *not* included in the extensions were peanut storage payments, agricultural management assistance, community food projects, the rural broadband program, value-added market development grants, federal procurement of biobased products, the biodiesel fuel education program, and the renewable energy systems program.

⁹ Permanent law refers to non-expiring provisions in Agriculture Adjustment Act of 1938 and the Agriculture Act of (continued...)

When the 2008 farm bill expired on September 30, 2012, the continuing resolution providing appropriations (P.L. 112-175, §§101, 111) continued discretionary programs, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and certain related nutrition programs. Certain other mandatory programs—such as the Market Assistance Program and the Conservation Reserve Program—ceased to operate insofar as new activity.¹⁰ On January 2, 2013, the entire 2008 farm bill, as it existed on September 30, 2012, was extended for the 2013 fiscal year and the 2013 crop year (P.L. 112-240). This avoided reverting to permanent law for the farm commodity programs, which was imminent for the dairy programs.

The situation from October to December 2013 somewhat repeated the end of 2012. Most of the discretionary parts of the farm bill expired again on October 1, 2013. Some programs ceased new operations, while others were able to continue under appropriations. For SNAP and the discretionary programs, farm bill expiration coupled with the two-week lapse during October 2013 of FY2014 appropriations (the “government shutdown”) did create difficulties in operating some farm bill programs. From January 1, 2014, until enactment of the 2014 farm bill on February 7, 2014, the dairy program had technically reverted to permanent law, though federal officials did not implement it, since a conference agreement was imminent.

Presidential Vetoes

Presidential vetoes of farm bills are not common. Since 1965, only the 2008 farm bill has been vetoed as stand-alone measure; it was vetoed twice. A 1995 farm bill was vetoed as part of a larger budget reconciliation package.¹¹

President George W. Bush vetoed the 2008 farm bill (H.R. 2419). When Congress overrode the veto to enact P.L. 110-234, it accidentally enrolled the law without Title III (the trade title). Congress immediately reintroduced the same bill with the trade title (H.R. 6124). President Bush vetoed this version as well, and Congress again overrode the veto to enact P.L. 110-246, a complete 2008 farm bill that included the trade title. The overrides in 2008 were the only time that a farm bill was enacted as a result of a veto override.

President Clinton vetoed a 1995 budget reconciliation package that included the first version of what became the 1996 farm bill, but the veto was not due to the farm bill itself but rather the controversial nature of the reconciliation bill in which the farm bill was embedded.

Implications for Congress

As farm bill reauthorization has tended to become more complex and engender greater political sensitivity, the process of enacting a new farm bill prior to the expiration of the existing law has become more difficult. As stakeholders in the farm bill have become more diverse, more people are affected by the legislative uncertainty around this process. This lack of certainty may translate into questions about the availability of future program benefits, some of which may affect agricultural production decisions or market uncertainty for agricultural commodities.

(...continued)

1949 that are temporarily suspended by each modern farm bill. The commodity support provisions of permanent law are inconsistent with today’s farming, marketing, and trade agreements and potentially costly to the federal government. See CRS Report RL34154, *Possible Expiration (or Extension) of the 2002 Farm Bill*.

¹⁰ See CRS Report R42442, *Expiration and Extension of the 2008 Farm Bill*.

¹¹ Prior to 1965, the first veto of a farm bill was in 1956, when President Eisenhower vetoed H.R. 12, the first version of the Agricultural Act of 1956.

Table I. Major Legislative Actions on Farm Bills, 2018-1965

	House Cmte.	House Passage	Senate Cmte.	Senate Passage	Conference Report Approval			Public Law
					Conf. Report	House Passage	Senate Passage	
2018 farm bill <i>(115th Congress)</i> Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018 Would cover 2019-2023 crops or until 9/30/2023	4/18/2018 H.R. 2 Vote of 26-20 5/3/2018 H.Rept. 115-661	5/18/2018 H.R. 2 Initial vote failed by 198-213 House may reconsider the vote through legislative day of June 22 (H.Res. 905)	—	—	—	—	—	—
Agricultural Act of 2014 <i>(113th Congress)</i> Covers 2014-2018 crops or until 9/30/2018	5/15/2013 H.R. 1947 Vote of 36-10 5/29/2013 H.Rept. 113-92	6/20/2013 H.R. 1947 Failed by 195-234 7/11/2013 H.R. 2642 Farm part vote of 216-208 9/19/2013 H.R. 3102 Nutrition part vote of 217-210 9/28/2013 H.Res. 361 combines House bills	5/14/2013 S. 954 Vote of 15-5 9/4/2013 S.Rept. 113-88	6/10/2013 S. 954 Vote of 66-27	1/27/2014 H.Rept. 113-333	1/29/2014 H.R. 2642 Vote of 251-166	2/4/2014 H.R. 2642 Vote of 68-32	2/7/2014 P.L. 113-79
Agriculture Reform, Food, and Jobs Act <i>(112th Congress)</i>	7/11/2012 H.R. 6083 Vote of 35-11 9/13/2012 H.Rept. 112-669	—	4/26/2012 S. 3240 Vote of 16-5 8/28/2012 S.Rept. 112-203	6/21/2012 S. 3240 Vote of 64-35	—	—	—	—
Early extension:	Extended five conservation programs of the 2008 farm bill through FY2014 (AMA, CSP, EQIP, FPP, and WHIP).							11/18/2011 P.L. 112-55
Extension:	One-year extension of the 2008 farm bill until 9/30/2013 and for the 2013 crop year (dairy price support extended until 12/31/2013, and MILC extended until 9/30/2013). Did not provide funding for programs without mandatory baseline.							1/2/2013 P.L. 112-240 Title VII

	Conference Report Approval							Public Law
	House Cmte.	House Passage	Senate Cmte.	Senate Passage	Conf. Report	House Passage	Senate Passage	
2008 farm bill	5/22/2007	7/27/2007	11/2/2007	12/14/2007	5/13/2008	5/14/2008	5/15/2008	5/21/2008
Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008	H.R. 2419	H.R. 2419	S. 2302	Amdt. to H.R. 2419	H.Rept. 110-627	H.R. 2419	H.R. 2419	Enrolling error omits Title III
Covers 2008-2012 crops or until 9/30/2012	Introduced 7/23/2007 H.Rept. 110-256	Vote of 231-191	S.Rept. 110-220	Vote of 79-14		Vote of 318-106	Vote of 81-15	Vetoed
						5/21/2008 Passed over veto 316-108	5/22/2008 Passed over veto 82-13	5/22/2008 P.L. 110-234
					Re-passed as new bill w/ Title III	5/22/2008 H.R. 6124 Vote of 306-110	6/5/2008 H.R. 6124 Vote of 77-15	6/18/2008 Vetoed
						6/18/2008 Passed over veto 317-109	6/18/2008 Passed over veto 80-14	6/18/2008 P.L. 110-246
Early extensions:	Extended the early-expiring MILC program of the 2002 farm bill for two years from 9/2005 through 8/2007 and two conservation programs (EQIP and Conservation Security Program) until FY2010.							2/8/2006 P.L. 109-171
Extensions:	Extended parts of the 2002 farm bill until 3/15/2008 but did not extend the direct and counter-cyclical farm commodity programs. See Division A, §751.							12/26/2007 P.L. 110-161
	Continued extension until 4/18/2008 and added extension of suspension of permanent law.							3/14/2008 P.L. 110-196
	Continued extension until 4/25/2008.							4/18/2008 P.L. 110-200
	Continued extension until 5/2/2008.							4/25/2008 P.L. 110-205
	Continued extension until 5/16/2008.							5/2/2008 P.L. 110-208
	Continued extension until 5/23/2008.							5/18/2008 P.L. 110-231
2002 farm bill	7/26/2001	10/5/2001	11/27/2001	2/13/2002	5/1/2002	5/2/2002	5/8/2002	5/13/2002
Farm Security and Rural Investment Act	H.R. 2646	H.R. 2646	S. 1731	Amdt. to H.R. 2646	H.Rept. 107-424	H.R. 2646	H.R. 2646	P.L. 107-171
Covers 2002-2007 crops or until 9/30/2007	8/2/2001 H.Rept. 107-191	Vote of 291-120	12/7/2001 S.Rept. 107-117	Vote of 58-40		Vote of 280-141	Vote of 64-35	

	House Cmte.	House Passage	Senate Cmte.	Senate Passage	Conference Report Approval			Public Law
					Conf. Report	House Passage	Senate Passage	
1996 farm bill Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 Covers 1996-2002 crops or until 9/30/2002	1/5/1996 H.R. 2854 introduced Vote of 29-17 2/9/1996 H.Rept. 104-462	2/29/1996 H.R. 2854 Vote of 270-155	1/26/1996 S. 1541 introduced	2/7/1996 S. 1541 Vote of 64-32 3/12/1996 Amdt. to H.R. 2854 Voice vote	3/25/1996 H.Rept. 104-494	3/29/1996 H.R. 2854 Vote of 318-89	3/28/1996 H.R. 2854 Vote of 74-26	4/4/1996 P.L. 104-127
Balanced Budget Act of 1995	10/26/1995 H.R. 2491 includes H.R. 2195	10/26/1995 H.R. 2491 Vote of 227-203	10/28/1995 S. 1357 includes Senate bill	10/28/1995 Amdt. to H.R. 2491 Vote of 52-47	11/16/1995 H.Rept. 104-347	11/20/1995 H.R. 2491 Vote of 235-192	11/17/1995 H.R. 2491 Vote of 52-47	12/6/1995 Vetoed
Freedom to Farm Act	8/4/1995 H.R. 2195 introduced 9/20/1995 fails cmte.	—	9/28/1995 unnumbered bill	—	—	—	—	—
Extension:	More than a year before expiration, extended the dairy program of the 1990 farm bill until 1996 and extended programs for wheat, feed grains, cotton, rice, peanuts, wool, and mohair until 1997 and honey until 1998.							8/10/1993 P.L. 103-66
1990 farm bill Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 Covers 1991-1995 crops or until 9/30/1995	2/5/1990 H.R. 3950 introduced 7/3/1990 H.Rept. 101-569	8/1/1990 H.R. 3950 Vote of 327-91	7/6/1990 S. 2830 S.Rept. 101-357	7/27/1990 S. 2830 Vote of 70-21	10/22/1990 H.Rept. 101-916	10/23/1990 S. 2830 Vote of 318-102	10/25/1990 S. 2830 Vote of 60-36	11/28/1990 P.L. 101-624
1985 farm bill Food Security Act of 1985 Covers 1986-1990 crops or until 9/30/1990	4/17/1985 H.R. 2100 introduced 9/13/1985 H.Rept. 99-271	10/8/1985 H.R. 2100 Vote of 282-141	9/30/1985 S. 1714 S.Rept. 99-145	11/23/1985 H.R. 2100 Vote of 61-28	12/17/1985 H.Rept. 99-447	12/18/1985 H.R. 2100 Vote of 325-96	12/18/1985 H.R. 2100 Vote of 55-38	12/23/1985 P.L. 99-198
1981 farm bill Agriculture and Food Act of 1981 Covers 1982-1985 crops or until 9/30/1985	5/18/1981 H.R. 3603 introduced 5/19/1981 H.Rept. 97-106	10/22/1981 S. 884 Vote of 192-160	4/7/1981 S. 884 introduced 5/27/1981 S.Rept. 97-126	9/18/1981 S. 884 Vote of 49-32	12/9/1981 H.Rept. 97-377 12/10/1981 S.Rept. 97-290	12/16/1981 S. 884 Vote of 205-203	12/10/1981 S. 884 Vote of 67-32	12/22/1981 P.L. 97-98
1977 farm bill Food and Agriculture Act of 1977 Covers 1978-1981 crops or until 9/30/1981	5/13/1977 H.R. 7171 introduced 5/16/1977 H.Rept. 95-348	7/28/1977 Amdt. to S. 275 Vote of 294-114	1/18/1977 S. 275 introduced 5/16/1977 S.Rept. 95-180	5/24/1977 S. 275 Vote of 69-18	9/9/1977 S.Rept. 95-418	9/16/1977 S. 275 Vote of 283-107	9/9/1977 S. 275 Vote of 63-8	9/29/1977 P.L. 95-113

	House Cmte.	House Passage	Senate Cmte.	Senate Passage	Conference Report Approval			Public Law
					Conf. Report	House Passage	Senate Passage	
1973 farm bill Agriculture and Consumer Protection Act Covers 1974-1977 crops or until 6/30/1977	6/20/1973 H.R. 8860 introduced 6/27/1973 H.Rept. 93-337	7/19/1973 Amdt. to S. 1888 Vote of 226-182	5/23/1973 S. 1888 introduced S.Rept. 93-173	6/8/1973 S. 1888 Vote of 78-9	7/31/1973 H.Rept. 93-427	8/3/1973 S. 1888 Vote of 252-151	8/3/1973 S. 1888	8/10/1973 P.L. 93-86
1970 farm bill Agricultural Act of 1970 Covers 1971-1973 crops	7/23/1970 H.R. 18546 H.Rept. 91-1329	8/5/1970 H.R. 18546 Vote of 212-171	9/4/1970 Amdt. to H.R. 18546 S.Rept. 91-1154	9/15/1970 Amdt. to H.R. 18546 Vote of 65-7	10/9/1970 H.Rept. 91-1594	10/13/1970 H.R. 18546 Vote of 191-145	11/19/1970 H.R. 18546 Vote of 48-35	11/30/1970 P.L. 91-524
Extension:	More than a year before expiration, extended the 1965 farm bill for one-year until 12/31/1970.							10/11/1968 P.L. 90-559
1965 farm bill Food and Agricultural Act Covers 1966-1969 crops	7/20/1965 H.R. 9811 H.Rept. 89-631	8/19/1965 H.R. 9811 Vote of 221-172	9/7/1965 Amdt. to H.R. 9811 S.Rept. 89-687	9/14/1965 Amdt. to H.R. 9811 Vote of 72-22	10/6/1965 H.Rept. 89-1123	10/8/1965 H.R. 9811 Vote of 219-150	10/12/1965 H.R. 9811 Voice vote	11/4/1965 P.L. 89-321

Source: CRS, using <http://www.congress.gov>. Includes only major legislative actions. Excludes subsequent revisions, such as in budget reconciliation, except for extensions as noted.

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