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Farm Bill Primer: Programs Without a Budget Baseline

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) provides budgetary projections of government spending called *baselines*. Following rules of both House and Senate budget committees, CBO assumes that many farm bill programs that receive mandatory funding will continue beyond the end of their authorization. That is, they have a *continuing baseline* beyond the end of a farm bill that gives them built-in future funding if Congress decides that the programs are to continue. Programs that do not have a continuing baseline may be referred to as *programs without a baseline* (that is, a baseline beyond their expiration).

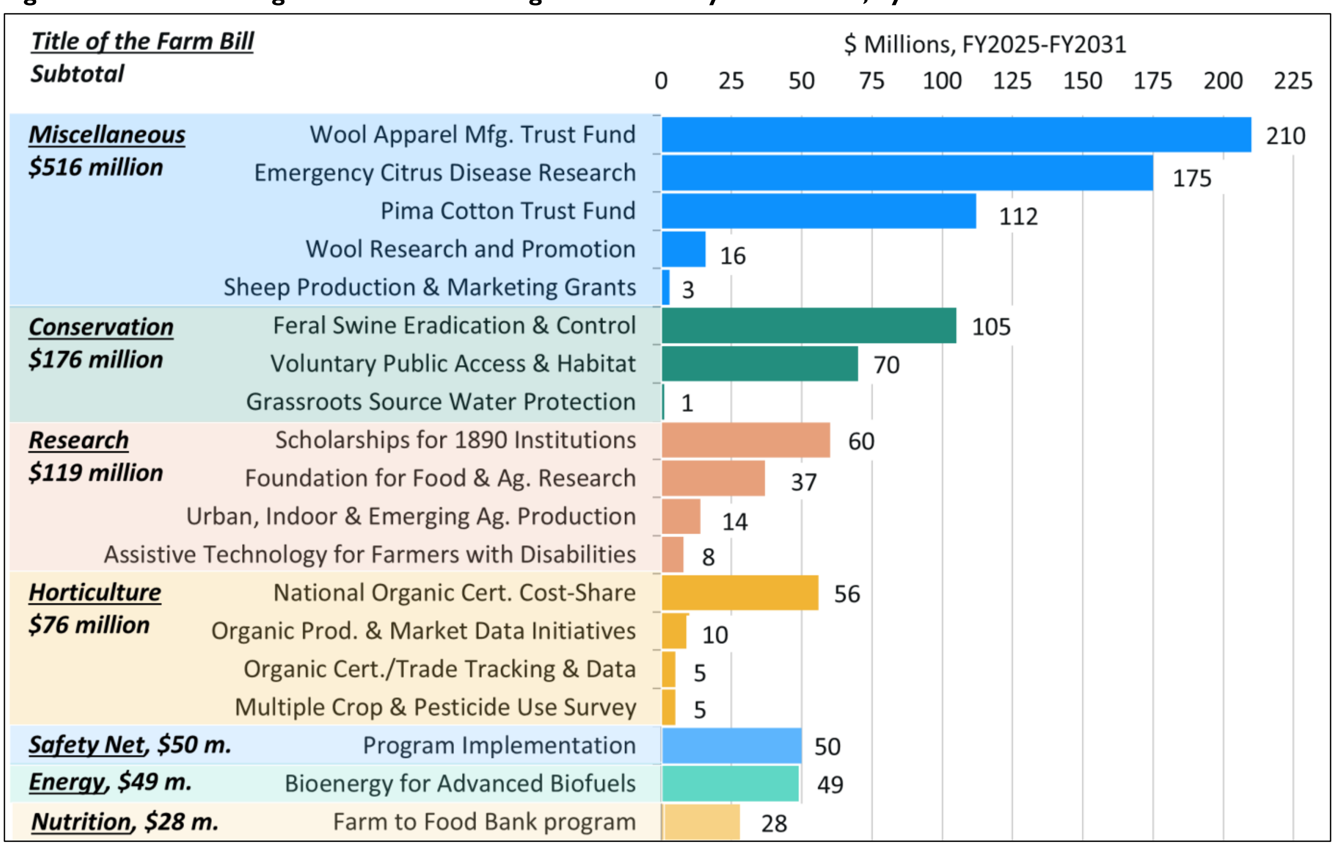
Mandatory spending programs do not need annual discretionary appropriations. Funds projected by the baseline may be reallocated or used as an offset for deficit reduction. Authorizing or reauthorizing mandatory funding for farm bill programs without a budget baseline results in a positive score (cost). For a bill under consideration to remain budget neutral, offsets would be needed elsewhere to reduce and balance outlays (CRS In Focus IF12233, *Farm Bill Primer: Budget Dynamics*).

Why Some Programs Have Baselines, Others Not

Different budget rules apply to programs created before and after the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 (P.L. 105-33). Mandatory spending programs that predate that law and have budget authority in the last year of their authorization generally may be assumed to continue as if they did not expire (2 U.S.C. §907(b)(2)). This is the case for long-standing farm bill programs. Some farm bill programs established after 1997 may not continue in the baseline if the authorizing and budget committees did not provide so (Congressional Budget Office (CBO), *The Budget and Economic Outlook: 2026 to 2036*, April 11, 2026, p. 75).

CBO projects future government spending in its official budget baselines but has not published a list of expiring programs without a continuing baseline. To compile the list in **Figure 1**, CRS analyzed the CBO scores of the 2018 farm bill, the 2025 budget reconciliation law (P.L. 119-21), current baseline projections, and the farm bill and extension acts, looking for programs that received mandatory funding but do not have a continuing baseline.

Figure 1. Farm Bill Programs Without a Budget Baseline beyond FY2031, by Title



Source: CRS analysis of P.L. 119-21 and Congressional Budget Office (CBO), "Estimated Budgetary Effects of P.L. 119-21, to Provide for Reconciliation Pursuant to Title II of H.Con.Res. 14, Relative to CBO's January 2025 Baseline," July 21, 2025.

Programs Affected

The FY2025 budget reconciliation law provided $1.014 billion for 19 agricultural programs that do not have a budget baseline beyond FY2031 (**Figure 1**).

By providing funding to these programs during the budget reconciliation process, Congress reauthorized the programs and covered a future farm bill period, generally through FY2031, and did so outside of the regular farm bill process (CRS Report R48775, *The Farm Bill After FY2025 Budget Reconciliation: Frequently Asked Questions*).

The 19 programs in **Figure 1** include 18 of the 21 programs without a baseline that existed during the 2018 farm bill and one new program (Assistive Technology Program for Farmers with Disabilities). These programs cover 7 of the 12 titles of the farm bill. No programs in the trade, credit, rural development, forestry, or crop insurance titles are affected by programs without a baseline.

The three programs without a baseline from the 2018 farm bill that did not receive new funding in the 2025 budget reconciliation law were the Biobased Markets Program, Biorefinery Assistance Program, and Rural Economic Development Program.

The Biobased Markets Program is proposed for reauthorization and additional mandatory funding in the House-passed farm bill (H.R. 7567, §9002(3)) (CRS Report R48918, *The 2026 Farm Bill (H.R. 7567): Comparison with Current Law*). Unobligated budget authority for the Biorefinery Assistance Program that was provided in past farm bills was rescinded as an offset in the 2024 farm bill extension (P.L. 118-22, Division B, §102(f)) and is proposed for rescission in H.R. 7567 (§9003(b)).

Comparison with Past Farm Bills

Farm bill programs without a budget baseline have been an issue of debate in Congress since the 2008 farm bill. Fewer programs without a budget baseline exist presently than during previous farm bill debates, and they comprise a smaller dollar amount either in total per reauthorization or on average per year (**Table 1**).

During past reauthorizations, some affected programs received new mandatory funding in the farm bill reauthorization and remained programs without a continuing budget baseline. In other cases, programs received a continuing baseline during reauthorization, sometimes by consolidating them into a larger umbrella program to exceed a $50 million scoring threshold.

- Of the 37 programs with no baseline in the 2008 farm bill, the 2014 farm bill renewed funding for 29. Of these 29 programs, 23 continued to be programs without a baseline and six received a continuing baseline either as an individual program or combined with other programs. The 2014 farm bill created 16 new programs without a baseline (CRS Report R41433, *Programs Without a Budget Baseline at the End of the 2008 Farm Bill*; CRS Report R44758, *Farm Bill Programs Without a Budget Baseline Beyond FY2018*).
- Of the 39 programs with no baseline in the 2014 farm bill, the 2018 farm bill renewed funding for 23. Of these 23 programs, 14 continued to be programs without a baseline and nine received a continuing baseline either as an individual program or combined with other programs. The 2018 farm bill created seven new programs without a baseline (CRS Report R45425, *Budget Issues That Shaped the 2018 Farm Bill*).
- Of the 21 programs with no baseline from the 2018 farm bill, some of which were extended with additional funding for one year through a farm bill extension in FY2024, the FY2025 budget reconciliation law renewed funding for 18 programs and created one new program without a baseline (CRS Insight IN12573, *Budget Reconciliation: Farm Bill Programs Without a Budget Baseline and Trade Promotion, Research, Horticulture, and Animal Health Programs with a Budget Baseline*).

Table 1. Farm Bill Programs That Received Mandatory Funding as Programs Without a Budget Baseline

Farm Bill or Act	Number of Programs	Expiration Year	Funding ($ million[a])
2008 farm bill	37	FY2012	$9,131[b]
2013 extension	0	—	$0
2014 farm bill	39	FY2018	$2,824
2018 farm bill	21	FY2023	$906
2024 extension	19	FY2024	$177
2025 budget reconciliation	19	FY2031	$1,014

Sources: CRS Report R41433, *Programs Without a Budget Baseline at the End of the 2008 Farm Bill*; CRS In Focus IF10780, *Farm Bill Primer: Programs Without Baseline Beyond FY2018*, and CRS Insight IN12573, *Budget Reconciliation: Farm Bill Programs Without a Budget Baseline and Trade Promotion, Research, Horticulture, and Animal Health Programs with a Budget Baseline*.

a. Amounts are for the five years covered by a farm bill, one year for the extensions, and seven years covered by the 2025 budget reconciliation law.

b. At enactment in 2008, the five-year estimated cost of affected programs was $9.131 billion. In 2012, the estimated cost to reauthorize the programs was as high as $14 billion.

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