

Next Farm Bill Primer Series

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Introduction

This report provides summaries of a series of short Congressional Research Service (CRS) primers that examine programs and policies included in legislation known as *the farm bill*. Farm bills are periodic, omnibus legislation focused on farm and food policy. The most recent farm bill is the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (2018 farm bill; P.L. 115-334), which largely expired in 2023. Congress enacted three, one-year extensions of the 2018 farm bill: in November 2023 to cover FY2024 and crop year 2024 (P.L. 118-22, Division B, §102), in December 2024 to cover FY2025 and crop year 2025 (P.L. 118-158, Division D, §4101), and in November 2025 to cover FY2026 (P.L. 119-37, Division E, §5002). The FY2025 budget reconciliation law (P.L. 119-21) partially covers policy for crop years 2026-2031. While the FY2025 reconciliation law reauthorized some farm bill programs, authorizations for many programs are set to expire in FY2026 unless Congress extends them through a new farm bill or other legislation.

The Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026 (House-passed farm bill; H.R. 7567) was introduced in February 2026 and considered by the House Committee on Agriculture in March 2026. The committee ordered it reported favorably, as amended, to the House on March 5, 2026. The House voted in favor of H.R. 7567 on April 30, 2026. On June 23, 2026, the chairman of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry released text for the Agricultural Act of 2026 for consideration in the Senate.

The 2018 farm bill authorized a broad array of programs and policies across 12 titles that define much of the federal government's role in the agricultural sector, including commodity support; conservation; trade; foreign and domestic nutrition assistance; farm credit and rural development; research, extension, and education; forestry; energy; horticulture; crop insurance; and livestock-related matters.

Twenty CRS primers are summarized in this report and organized under descriptive headings. These primers may serve as quick reference resources for Members of Congress and congressional staff. They describe many of the leading programs and policies within the 2018 farm bill. The primers also identify some of the higher-profile policy issues that may arise as Congress engages in the process of writing or debating a new farm bill. In addition, the primers highlight some policy options that Congress could consider as it undertakes this task.

This report includes summaries of the following farm bill primers.

- *Farm Bill Primer: Overview and Status*
- *Farm Bill Primer: Budget Dynamics*
- *Farm Bill Primer: Programs Without a Budget Baseline*
- *Farm Bill Primer: Animal Disease Management and Prevention*
- *Farm Bill Primer: Farm Safety Net Programs*
- *Farm Bill Primer: PLC and ARC Farm Support Programs*
- *Farm Bill Primer: MAL and LDP Farm Support Programs*
- *Farm Bill Primer: Support for the Dairy Industry*
- *Farm Bill Primer: Federal Crop Insurance Program*
- *Farm Bill Primer: Disaster Assistance*
- *Farm Bill Primer: Conservation Title*
- *Farm Bill Primer: Energy Title*

- *Farm Bill Primer: Forestry Title*
- *Farm Bill Primer: Horticulture Title*
- *Farm Bill Primer: SNAP and Nutrition Title Programs*
- *Farm Bill Primer: Agricultural Research and Extension*
- *Farm Bill Primer: USDA Support for Aquaculture Operations*
- *Farm Bill Primer: Rural Development Title*
- *Farm Bill Primer: Rural Broadband Provisions*
- *Farm Bill Primer: Trade and Export Promotion Programs*

The primers listed herein identify CRS subject matter analysts and provide references to related CRS reports that explore specific topic areas within the farm bill in greater depth or analyze individual programs or policies.

For other discussions on farm bills, see the following CRS reports.

- CRS Report R48775, *The Farm Bill After FY2025 Budget Reconciliation: Frequently Asked Questions*
- CRS Report R45210, *Farm Bills: Major Legislative Actions, 1965-2026*
- CRS Report R45525, *The 2018 Farm Bill (P.L. 115-334): Summary and Side-by-Side Comparison*
- CRS Report R48918, *The 2026 Farm Bill (H.R. 7567): Comparison with Current Law*

Overview and Budget

CRS In Focus IF12047, *Farm Bill Primer: Overview and Status*, by Megan Stubbs and Jim Monke

A farm bill is a collection of laws and changes to laws that authorize, reauthorize, or amend various food, agriculture, and rural policies. Congress has passed farm bills about every five years for nearly a century. A periodic farm bill provides Congress with an opportunity to reexamine agriculture and food policies and programs. This In Focus provides an overview of the farm bill, including what is typically included, how programs are funded, and the status of congressional debate.

CRS In Focus IF12233, *Farm Bill Primer: Budget Dynamics*, by Jim Monke

The farm bill authorizes funding for a wide range of food, agriculture, and rural development programs. Funding is divided into two main categories—mandatory spending and discretionary spending. Mandatory spending is authorized primarily for farm commodity, conservation, crop insurance, and nutrition assistance programs. Discretionary spending is authorized for most other farm bill programs, including rural development, research, and credit programs. Some farm bill titles and programs have received both types of funding. This In Focus provides an overview of mandatory spending by the farm bill.

CRS In Focus IF12115, *Farm Bill Primer: Programs Without a Budget Baseline*, by Jim Monke

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) provides *baselines*, which are budgetary projections of government spending. CBO assumes from a budgetary perspective that many farm bill programs receiving mandatory funding will continue beyond their authorizations; that is, they have a *continuing baseline* beyond the end of a farm bill. Programs that do not have a continuing baseline may be referred to as *programs without a baseline*. Authorization or reauthorization of mandatory funding for farm bill programs without a budget baseline results in a positive cost for a bill. The FY2025 budget reconciliation law (P.L. 119-21) provided funding for 19 agricultural programs that do not have budget baselines beyond FY2031.

Animal Health

CRS In Focus IF12934, *Farm Bill Primer: Animal Disease Management and Prevention*, by Christine Whitt

Animal agriculture accounts for about half of the total value of U.S. agricultural products. Animal and livestock diseases (e.g., highly pathogenic avian influenza and foot-and-mouth disease) can be costly to control, disrupt domestic supply and international trade of animal products, and possibly affect human health. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is responsible for protecting and improving animal health in the United States. Congress provides APHIS with approximately \$400 million annually to administer several programs to prevent and respond to animal disease. This In Focus describes those APHIS programs and identifies selected issues of potential interest to Congress.

Commodity Programs and Farm Support

CRS In Focus IF12218, *Farm Bill Primer: Farm Safety Net Programs*, by Stephanie Rosch

The so-called federal “farm safety net” is a collection of programs administered by USDA that provide risk protection and income support to farmers in the United States who experience natural disasters, adverse growing conditions, and/or low market prices. Farm safety net programs fall into three categories: the federal crop insurance program (FCIP), standing agricultural disaster programs, and agricultural commodity support programs. The FCIP and standing agricultural disaster programs are permanently authorized under various laws.

CRS In Focus IF12114, *Farm Bill Primer: PLC and ARC Farm Support Programs*, by Stephanie Rosch

The Price Loss Coverage (PLC) and the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) programs provide income support to producers of certain eligible commodities. The amount of support varies by commodity and from year to year on the basis of program enrollments and market conditions. The 2018 farm bill reauthorized these programs with relatively minor changes that expanded support available to producers.

CRS In Focus IF12140, *Farm Bill Primer: MAL and LDP Farm Support Programs*, by Stephanie Rosch

The Marketing Assistance Loan (MAL) program has been a significant feature of U.S. farm policy since the 1930s. The MAL program provides farmers with loans that are collateralized by eligible stored commodities and provides price support to borrowers when market prices drop below levels specified in statute. Congress has authorized the Loan Deficiency Payment (LDP) program since the 1980s. The LDP program provides payments to farmers eligible to receive price support under the MAL program. Farmers must meet eligibility requirements for these programs and cannot receive both MAL and LDP benefits for the same commodity.

CRS In Focus IF12202, *Farm Bill Primer: Support for the Dairy Industry*, by Christine Whitt

The 2018 farm bill provides financial support to the dairy industry through a variety of programs. Dairy Margin Coverage (DMC), enacted in the 2018 farm bill, is the primary program that provides income support to milk producers. DMC allows milk producers to buy a guaranteed margin—calculated as the “all milk” price minus feed costs—for their milk production. Each year, participating dairy producers choose a margin coverage level and the share of their milk production history to cover. They receive DMC payments for months in which the margin is triggered on the basis of USDA’s calculation of the milk-feed margin.

CRS In Focus IF12201, *Farm Bill Primer: Federal Crop Insurance Program*, by Stephanie Rosch

The FCIP helps make insurance coverage from private sector insurers available to farmers to help mitigate potential financial consequences of adverse growing and market conditions. USDA regulates the policies offered and subsidizes the premiums that farmers pay to encourage farmer participation in the program. Premium subsidies covered about 60% of the total premium on average for all policies sold in 2024. Since its inception in 1938, the FCIP has grown from an ancillary program with low participation to a central pillar of federal farm support, with more than 543 million acres and \$192 billion in crop and livestock value insured in 2024. The FCIP is permanently authorized, but Congress has modified it in various ways in periodic farm bills.

CRS In Focus IF12101, *Farm Bill Primer: Disaster Assistance*, by Christine Whitt

Agricultural production involves risks relating to weather, yield, markets, price, and other factors. Congress has authorized several federal programs to help agricultural producers recover from the effects of natural disasters, including the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program and livestock and fruit tree disaster programs. Congress has also provided supplemental disaster assistance, referred to as “ad hoc assistance.” Except for ad hoc assistance, agriculture disaster programs are permanently authorized and receive “such sums as necessary” through mandatory spending authority.

Conservation

CRS In Focus IF12024, *Farm Bill Primer: Conservation Title*, by Megan Stubbs

The conservation title of a farm bill generally contains numerous reauthorizations, amendments, and new programs that encourage farmers and ranchers to implement resource-conserving practices on private land. Most conservation programs administered by USDA can be grouped into the following categories: working land programs, land retirement programs, easement programs, partnership programs, and conservation compliance. This In Focus describes the current conservation program portfolio, funding, and status of program authorization.

Energy

CRS In Focus IF10639, *Farm Bill Primer: Energy Title*, by Kelsi Bracmort

The 2018 farm bill was the fourth farm bill to contain an energy title. The energy title has supported renewable energy, particularly agriculture-related energy, energy efficiency, and bioproducts (e.g., bio-based cleaning supplies). This In Focus summarizes the 2018 farm bill energy title, energy title funding for the last four farm bills, legislative support for agriculture-related energy, and legislative issues to provide background and context for discussions about authorization of another farm bill.

Forestry

CRS In Focus IF12054, *Farm Bill Primer: Forestry Title*, by Anne A. Riddle

Forest management, as well as forest research and forestry assistance, are often considered by the agriculture committees in Congress. Although most forestry programs are permanently authorized, they are often amended in farm bills. The 2018 farm bill included a separate forestry title. This In Focus summarizes some of the forestry provisions addressed in the 2018 farm bill and related issues that Congress may debate as it considers a next farm bill.

Horticulture, Specialty Crops, and Organic Farming

CRS In Focus IF13225, *Farm Bill Primer: Horticulture Title*, by Zachary T. Neuhofer and Jason O. Heflin

The horticulture title of a farm bill generally contains reauthorizations, amendments, and new programs that support specialty crops; organic agriculture; local, regional, and urban food systems; hemp production; and pesticide regulation. These programs are administered primarily through USDA, although the primary law regulating pesticides, the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (7 U.S.C. §§136-136y), involves the Environmental Protection Agency.

Nutrition Assistance

CRS In Focus IF12255, *Farm Bill Primer: SNAP and Nutrition Title Programs*, by Randy Alison Aussenberg, Gene Falk, and Kara Clifford Billings

The nutrition title of a farm bill typically reauthorizes nutrition or domestic food assistance programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly the Food Stamp Program). These programs were reauthorized by the 2018 farm bill and subsequently extended to September 30, 2026. The 2025 budget reconciliation law (P.L. 119-21) made changes to SNAP's financing as well as eligibility (work and citizenship specifically) and benefit calculation rules.

Research, Extension, and Related Matters

CRS In Focus IF12023, *Farm Bill Primer: Agricultural Research and Extension*, by Eleni G. Bickell

The research title of a farm bill authorizes and amends agricultural research, extension, and education (REE) programs administered by USDA. This title supports REE activities at land-grant institutions and other eligible nonfederal partners, as well as intramural USDA research programs and departmental policy initiatives. Most of the research title programs require annual discretionary appropriations; a few of the programs receive mandatory spending.

CRS In Focus IF12275, *Farm Bill Primer: USDA Support for Aquaculture Operations*, by Eleni G. Bickell

Aquaculture facilities that grow aquatic animal and plant species in controlled environments are generally eligible for the same support from USDA that is available to all U.S. farmers, ranchers, and producers. The 2018 farm bill reauthorized and expanded provisions of USDA's aquaculture research and assistance programs. Aquaculture producers are also eligible for other USDA competitive grants available to all U.S. agricultural producers. Aquaculture stakeholders have identified policy recommendations in support of the industry, some of which Congress could address in a future farm bill.

Rural Development

CRS In Focus IF13249, *Farm Bill Primer: Rural Development Title*, by Zachary T. Neuhofer and Lisa S. Benson

The rural development title of a farm bill reauthorizes, amends, and creates programs administered by USDA's Rural Development (RD) mission area. These programs focus on rural broadband, rural utilities, business development, and community facilities. The rural development title also addresses issues that may affect rural communities, such as substance abuse across rural areas. The 2018 farm bill amended, reauthorized, and codified many RD programs, which were subsequently extended through FY2026. This In Focus provides an overview of selected changes made to existing RD programs as well as new RD programs and initiatives established through the 2018 farm bill.

CRS In Focus IF13248, *Farm Bill Primer: Rural Broadband Provisions*, by Colby Leigh Pechtoll and Lisa S. Benson

Since 2002, Congress has included provisions addressing rural broadband (i.e., high-speed internet access) in the rural development title of farm bills. The 2018 farm bill amended, reauthorized, and codified many of the rural broadband programs administered by USDA. The 2018 farm bill also provided authorizations of appropriations for many of the USDA broadband programs. Congress subsequently extended these authorities through FY2026. This In Focus addresses the changes made to USDA broadband programs and discusses new USDA broadband programs established through the 2018 farm bill.

Trade and Export Promotion

CRS In Focus IF12155, *Farm Bill Primer: Trade and Export Promotion Programs*, by Benjamin Tsui

Agricultural exports are significant to farmers and the U.S. economy. With U.S. agricultural production growing faster than domestic demand, farmers and agriculturally oriented firms rely on export markets to sustain prices and revenue. The trade title of the 2018 farm bill authorizes export market development programs and export credit guarantee programs to expand foreign markets for U.S. farmers and food manufacturers. These market expansion programs derive their statutory authorities from the Agricultural Trade Act of 1978 (P.L. 95-501, as amended) and are authorized through FY2026.

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