

The Future of Farm Bill Legislation

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Overview

Given that significant farm bill provisions were included in the OBBBA, will there no longer be a stand-alone farm bill in the future? Will it simply be permanent legislation that will be updated periodically? This is an interesting question that I have received numerous times since the passage of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA). It's an excellent and very forward-looking question about the future of U.S. agricultural policy. My thoughts are that, based on the nature and scope of the OBBBA, it is unlikely that the stand-alone, comprehensive farm bill will be eliminated *entirely* in the near future. However, the OBBBA has fundamentally changed the landscape.

Rationale for Expecting a Stand-Alone Farm Bill

Significant Provisions Remain Outside OBBBA. While the OBBBA included major, multi-year extensions and enhancements to core areas like Commodity Programs (ARC, PLC), Crop Insurance, and certain Tax Provisions for agriculture, it left several critical titles and programs either partially addressed or untouched. These include:

- Conservation (many programs, despite some funding being extended by the Inflation Reduction Act)
- Nutrition (like SNAP, although OBBBA may have included budget-related changes)
- Rural Development
- Research, Extension, and Education
- Forestry
- Horticulture/Specialty Crops

The Need for Bipartisan Updates. The traditional farm bill process is a rare instance of comprehensive, bipartisan legislation. Agricultural committees in Congress are generally motivated to draft and pass a full bill to address new issues and fine-tune existing programs across all titles, a process that a large, omnibus bill like OBBBA often bypasses.

Talk of a "Skinny Farm Bill." Following OBBBA's passage, there have been discussions in Congress about passing a "skinny farm bill" to reauthorize the programs that the OBBBA did not include or fully address, indicating that the full process is still seen as necessary.



The Nature of Future Legislation

The OBBBA is seen as extending and making some farm policy changes permanent or long-term (e.g., through 2031 for some commodity programs). The farm bill is not permanent legislation in the sense of never expiring. Congress typically writes a new bill every five or six years, suspending the old, permanent law (from the 1930s and 40s) for the duration of the new bill. The OBBBA's actions effectively act as a *very* long-term extension and update for its included titles. Because the OBBBA resolved some of the most expensive and contentious titles (Commodity and Crop Insurance) for several years, it may reduce the urgency and political leverage for future stand-alone farm bills. Future farm bills will now likely start with the policies established by the OBBBA as their new baseline, focusing their debates and funding changes on the remaining titles and any new issues that emerge.

Specific Farm Bill Titles or Programs Not Included in the OBBBA

The "One Big Beautiful Bill Act" (OBBBA) focused primarily on the titles of the Farm Bill that have direct budgetary impacts and could be passed through the reconciliation process. Indeed, the OBBBA, in its agricultural provisions, focused heavily on the major spending titles. As a result, many other important titles from the 2018 Farm Bill (and previous versions) were not fully reauthorized or were only partially addressed in a way that left programs for a future bill.

The key Farm Bill titles and areas that were generally **not** included or were left for a separate, traditional Farm Bill, often referred to as a "skinny farm bill" are as follows:

- **Title III: Trade:**
 - While OBBBA may have created or adjusted some trade promotion funding (like a new Agricultural Trade Promotion and Facilitation Program), the full reauthorization of key programs like the Market Access Program (MAP) and the Foreign Market Development Program (FMD) was largely left out or addressed only as part of a temporary or replacement measure.
- **Title V: Credit:**
 - Programs for farm credit, which provide government-backed loans and guarantees, were generally not the primary focus of the OBBBA's agricultural title.
- **Title VII: Research, Extension, and Related Matters:**
 - Many of the core research and extension programs and institutions (like funding for land-grant universities, State Agricultural Experiment Stations, and various research agencies) were *not* comprehensively reauthorized, though some targeted research funding for specialty crops and facilities may have been included.
- **Title VIII: Forestry:**
 - The Forestry title, which deals with public and private forest land management, was mostly excluded. For example, the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program, which provides payments to counties with federal forestland, was specifically noted as being handled in separate legislation.



- **Title IX: Energy:**
 - The Energy title programs, which support renewable energy and bio-based products, were generally *not* the focus of the OBBBA, though changes to tax credits (like the Clean Fuel Production Tax Credit) did have energy implications.
- **Title XII: Miscellaneous (Including many "Orphan Programs"):**
 - This title includes a wide array of programs for beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers, livestock and poultry disease preparedness, and other assistance that are often considered "orphan programs." Many of these programs were not addressed in the OBBBA and required separate action.

Key Reason for Exclusion

The primary reason these titles were often excluded is that the OBBBA was passed through the budget reconciliation process. This process is limited by the Byrd Rule, which means that most provisions must directly affect federal spending or revenues and cannot primarily be matters of *policy*. Many of the programs in the excluded titles are either:

1. Policy-focused, not directly budgetary.
2. Discretionary spending programs, which do not have the same immediate budget impact as mandatory programs like commodities and SNAP.

In short, a subsequent "skinny farm bill" would likely be needed to address the policy updates and full reauthorization of these other crucial titles.

Conclusion

It is highly likely that there will be a stand-alone farm bill in the future, but its focus and size may be different due to the OBBBA. It will remain temporary legislation that will be updated periodically (typically every five years), but key parts of the farm safety net are now secured for a longer time horizon than usual.

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