



Congress should fix wasteful agriculture policy in farm bill

BY KAY COLES JAMES, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR — 12/03/18 10:00 AM EST
THE VIEWS EXPRESSED BY CONTRIBUTORS ARE THEIR OWN AND NOT THE VIEW OF THE HILL

2 SHARES

SHARE

TV

Just In...

Lawmakers agree to push back shutdown deadline by 2 weeks

SENATE — 2M 53S AGO

Clintons postpone speaking event to attend Bush funeral services in Washington

BLOG BRIEFING ROOM
— 7M 55S AGO

Michael Cohen plea for leniency borders on lunacy

OPINION — 13M 21S AGO

Orthodox Jewish man assaulted from behind in New York

BLOG BRIEFING ROOM
— 18M 7S AGO

Ex-employee sentenced for shooting conspiracy theorist

BLOG BRIEFING ROOM
— 21M 47S AGO

Dem strategist says George H.W. Bush will be remembered as one of 20th century's 'best presidents'

RIISING — 22M 53S AGO

First Palestinian-American congresswoman plans West Bank trip for freshman, backs BDS

HOUSE — 30M 48S AGO



© Getty Images

The biggest agricultural disaster this year is not some sort of crop failure. It is the farm bill expected to be served up soon in Congress. House and Senate negotiators have been hammering out a “compromise” bill for weeks. Unfortunately, those familiar with the discussions report that the final bill will likely fail on three key counts. First, it will not rein in excessive farm subsidy programs. Second, it will not reform the food stamp program in any meaningful way. Third, it will not to repeal the federal rule that allows the government to regulate almost any waterway in America, including “waters” that are dry land practically every day of the year.

Agricultural subsidies that allegedly help farmers manage risk cost taxpayers about \$15 billion a year, even though most farmers receive little to no subsidies. Most farmers generally receive aid only when they actually need assistance due to a disaster of some kind. But the bulk of the real money goes elsewhere to a small number of agricultural producers growing a small number of commodities. According to the Congressional Research Service, an astonishing 94 percent of farm program support goes to just six commodities. Those are corn, cotton, peanuts, rice, soybeans, and wheat. These commodities account for just 28 percent of total farm receipts. But these favored farms that produce them rake in billions of dollars through multiple subsidy programs.

Though often called “safety net” programs, most of the money is used primarily to help the recipients meet revenue targets, not to deal with actual crop losses. This is not a safety net. It is a massive social welfare

Kudlow: US to end subsidies for electric cars, renewables

ADMINISTRATION — 32M 1S AGO

[VIEW ALL](#)[View Latest Opinions >>](#)

program. Despite myths to the contrary, this inappropriate corporate welfare goes primarily to wealthy large agricultural producers, not to small family farms. There are organizations across the ideological spectrum that have been trying to promote modest reforms to this out of control handout system. Unfortunately, House and Senate leaders created a very closed process when debating their farm bills over the years, ensuring that any common sense amendments could not get enacted.

The negotiated farm bill is expected not just to reject important and widely supported reforms, it may actually make things worse. Should farm subsidies go to individuals who, by any reasonable definition, are not farmers? Of course not. The Senate farm bill would have tried to close a loophole that makes such an abuse possible. The compromise bill, however, is thought to adopt the House language that would actually expand this loophole, making it possible for more family members not in farming to receive subsidies, specifically cousins, nephews, and nieces.

As for addressing food stamps, the House had added a provision to strengthen work requirements for eligibility. Under its proposal, more beneficiaries who are capable of working would have been required to either work or prepare to get a job as a condition of continuing in the program. It seems reasonable, and after all, unemployment remains at its lowest point in nearly 50 years. Yet while unemployment is at 3.7 percent, the share of Americans still on food stamps hovers at 13 percent.

As the successful 1996 welfare reforms showed, work requirements help our welfare system achieve its goal of reducing poverty especially among children. Most Americans know this instinctively. Indeed, 92 percent support work requirements in the welfare system. Unfortunately, most members of the committee seem to have lost sight of this fact. They have reportedly dropped the work requirements passed by the House.

Perhaps the most inexplicable failure is resistance in the committee to repealing the federal clean water rule. This Obama era regulation declared that the government had the authority to regulate virtually every "water" you can think of, including even some types of manmade ditches. As you can imagine, this significant expansion of regulatory power has made it more difficult for real farmers to engage in normal farming activities.

The Trump administration is trying to get rid of this rule through the regulatory process, but legislation is needed to remove any obstacles in doing so. Legislation will also help ensure that such overreach does not occur again. Surely there is no vehicle more fitting than the farm bill to address what is arguably the biggest regulatory obstacle facing farmers. But the conferees seem to prefer punting to fixing the problem. Their deal reportedly includes no provision to eliminate the clean water rule.

As I write this, the final bill has not been released by the committee, so there is still a chance that the members will see their way to doing a lot better by farmers and by taxpayers. It is long past time that Congress address the egregious waste in the farm subsidy system, improve the efficacy of the food stamp program, and free farmers from having routine land use decisions be second guessed by Washington bureaucrats.

If the current Congress is unable work these broadly supported sensible reforms into the farm bill this year, lawmakers would do better to do what they did last year by simply extending the existing farm bill for another year. At least that would give the new Congress a chance to get reform right next year, instead of locking in bad policy for the next five years.

Kay Coles James is president of [The Heritage Foundation](#).

TAGS GOVERNMENT AGRICULTURE REGULATION NUTRITION CONGRESS WELFARE POLICY

SHARE

TWEET



Trump, Russia and lessons from mob: Did 'godfathers' steer collusion probe?

BY JOHN SOLOMON, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR - 11/30/18 04:45 PM EST

THE VIEWS EXPRESSED BY CONTRIBUTORS ARE THEIR OWN AND NOT THE VIEW OF THE HILL

Just In...

First Palestinian-American congresswoman plans West Bank trip for freshman, backs BDS

HOUSE — 53S AGO

Kudlow: US to end subsidies for electric cars, renewables

ADMINISTRATION — 2M 6S AGO

Climate change is no longer a future problem

OPINION — 13M 26S AGO

GOP lawmakers say party isn't trying to learn from midterm losses

CAMPAIGN — 15M 14S AGO

Dozens of signatories added to Paris cyber agreement

CYBERSECURITY — 16M 16S AGO

Pollster says climate change more likely to be presented as global issue in polls

WHAT AMERICA'S THINKING — 21M 7S AGO

TV producer Ryan Murphy announces multi-million dollar initiative to vote out anti-LGBTQ lawmakers

3,897 SHARES

SHARE

TW

Back in the mafia's heyday, FBI and IRS agents had a set of surveillance rules.

If one mobster showed up in town, pay notice. If two arrived, be suspicious. If three or four were in the same vicinity, something was going down.

And if five or more headed to the same neck of the woods, a meeting of consiglieri or [La Cosa Nostra's](#) council was likely happening. (This, because there were always five families in New York and some adjunct families elsewhere that made up the council's leadership.)

There also was another rule of thumb: Mobsters would always have the same calling card, or excuse, to be in town. Attending a funeral (the mid-1980s mob meeting in Chicago) or a vacation in the sticks (the infamous 1957 gathering in upstate New York) were some of the more memorable ones.

Early in my reporting that unraveled the origins of the Trump-Russia collusion probe, tying it to [Hillary Clinton's campaign](#) and [possible Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act \(FISA\) abuses](#), I started to see patterns just as in the old mob meetings: FBI or intelligence-connected figures kept showing up in Trump Town USA during the 2016 campaign with a common calling card.

The question now is, who sent them and why?

Interviews with more than 50 witnesses in the Trump case and reviews of hundreds of pages of court filings confirm the following:

- At least six people with long-established ties to the FBI or to U.S. and Western intelligence made entrees to key figures in the Trump business organization or his presidential campaign between March and October 2016;