

The Farm Bill – Not just for farmers

The farm bill helps the hungry, assists with food safety and supports land conservation efforts too

**By Richard Guebert, Jr.,
President, Illinois Farm Bureau**

Living in an agriculture-rich state like Illinois, you may have heard news stories about the farm bill and thought, “what’s that?” Or, you may assume that, given its name, it impacts only farmers. The truth is, our nation’s farm bill provides vital services to many more non-farmers than it does farmers.

Every five years or so, Congress writes a farm bill. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) oversees farm bill spending for programs including nutrition assistance, conservation, trade, renewable energy, energy efficiency, rural development, and food safety. The farm bill makes up less than four percent of the federal budget.

Who is helped by the farm bill? Hungry Americans make up a sizable portion of that group. The USDA reports that 71 percent of farm bill funding last year supported nutrition programs. More than 44 million people have access to food through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The U.S. Census Bureau reports that 15 percent of small-town households participated in SNAP, on average, between 2012 and 2016. That compares to an average participation rate of about 12.5 percent in metropolitan areas. Thirty-two million children are served school lunches and about 15 million are served school breakfast. Also each month, the farm bill provides better nutrition through the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program to about 8 million people. Food banks that help households needing short-term food assistance also benefit from the farm bill.

So, too, do food safety efforts. Think programs to reduce foodborne illnesses and to teach consumers about safe food handling.

Our land also benefits. Seven percent of the fiscal year 2017 USDA budget went toward conservation and forestry programs. Farm bill funds promote good conservation practices and opportunities for farmers. They create wildlife habitats, protect grass-

land and forests, and restore wetlands.

The bill fuels future benefits by funding agriculture-related research and education. The 2017 USDA budget provided \$2.9 billion to research everything from antimicrobial resistance in pathogens of humans and livestock to addressing the impacts of climate change.

About 16 percent of the USDA budget funds farm and commodity programs, including the federal crop insurance program, which serves as a safety net for many of the nation’s 3.2 million farmers. Farmers voluntarily purchase crop insurance to protect against income loss due to natural disasters and due to low yields or low prices. This risk management tool is especially important this year, as farmers’ net income is expected to drop for a fifth straight year. The farm bill also helps farmers by funding efforts to develop foreign markets for commodities grown and raised in the U.S.

With the current farm bill set to expire in September, Congress will soon begin writing a new one. Illinois Farm Bureau wants to ensure the new legislation continues to support the ag industry, trade, rural development, food security, and the environment for the next five years.

Whether you live on a farm or in the city,



Richard Guebert, Jr.,

there’s a decent chance the farm bill directly or indirectly impacts you, someone you know, or an issue you care about. That makes the months leading up to September worth watching.

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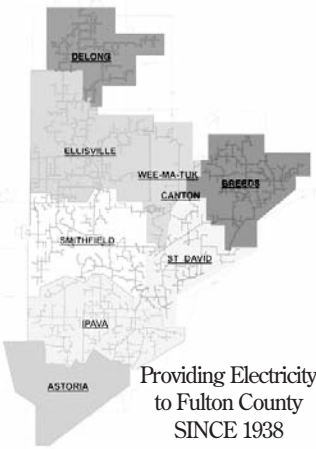
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