



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on June 22, 2012

## Senate Passes Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act of 2012

On Thursday, the U.S. Senate [passed](#) the Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act of 2012, 64-35, with the support of 46 Democrats and 16 Republicans. The measure will fund agriculture, farm, and nutrition programs for the next five years at a projected cost of \$969 billion over the next 10 years.



The biggest item in the bill is a projected \$768 billion over the next 10 years for the “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program,” also known as food stamps. The *Wall Street Journal* writes, “The new law makes some minor changes to the program, such as preventing lottery winners and certain college students from collecting benefits, shaving costs by \$4.5 billion over 10 years.”

The bill’s inclusion of both farm-related items and social programs made it difficult for some lawmakers to approve it in good conscience. Freshman Senator Ron Johnson (R-Wis.), for example, proposed an amendment that would have separated the Senate bill into two parts, one dealing with agriculture, and the other with social programs; however, the amendment failed. As a result, Johnson voted against the legislation, observing:

The farm bill is a great example of what’s wrong in Washington. Decades ago someone realized that combining food stamps and agriculture programs together in one bill is a great way to pass both with a minimum of debate and controversy. That’s the only reason these unrelated provisions are linked today.

The final farm bill package also included the controversial Dairy Security Act, which critics [assert](#) would cost more than the estimates showed and that lower prices would drive small farmers out of business.

“The Dairy Security Act is bad policy,” declared Dairy Business Association president Jerry Meissner, adding:

We recognize that volatility has been a real problem, but dairymen can’t be willing to accept any type of change, just because it is something new. We don’t need another dairy policy program of the same nature. Farmers need to be better educated on using risk management tools that are currently available. Our industry cannot afford this severe net revenue loss on every load of milk that farmers sell.

And there were other critics of the Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act.

As noted by FreedomWorks, “This farm bill continues to be a wasteful package of cronyism that will



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subsidize government-connected farm corporations at taxpayer expense.”

A number of worthy prospective [amendments](#) were voted down.

Senator Rand Paul proposed an amendment that would have limited payments and benefits outlined in the bill to those with an adjusted gross income of \$250,000 or less, but it failed 15-84. Just before the vote, Paul [gave](#) an impassioned plea for his amendment:

My friends across the aisle are commonly saying why don't those of means pay more or receive less? This amendment would do precisely that.

Nine percent of farmers earn more than \$250,000 worth of gross income. This would limit their payments. Currently nine percent of farmers are receiving nearly a third of the benefits.

A good question for the Senate might be, what do Scottie Pippen, Larry Flynt, and David Rockefeller have in common? The answer would be that besides being very rich, they've all gotten farm subsidies in the past.

I think this should change and that the wealthy shouldn't be receiving farm subsidies. This amendment would get rid of this. And I yield back the remainder of my time and encourage the senators to support this amendment.

The Congressional Budget Office projected that Paul's amendment would have saved \$7 billion.

An amendment proposed by Senator Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) would have permitted states to require that any food, beverage, or other edible product for sale have a label on it indicating if the item contains a genetically-engineered ingredient.

Genetically-modified organisms have become a major item on Sanders' agenda. He contends that food labels are mandated to list over 3,000 ingredients, including high fructose corn syrup and trans-fat, but that the United States is one of the few civilized countries in the world that does not require genetically-engineered ingredients to be labeled as such.

Still, Sanders remained optimistic following the amendment's failure:

This is the very first time a bill on labeling genetically engineered food has been brought before the Senate. It was opposed by virtually every major food corporation in the country. While we wish we could have gotten more votes, this is a good step forward and something we are going to continue to work on. The people of Vermont and the people of America have a right to know what's in the food that they eat.

Senator Mike Johanns (R-Neb.) proposed an amendment that would have prohibited the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency from conducting aerial surveillance to inspect agricultural operations or to record images of those operations; however, that amendment was also rejected.

Senator Jim Risch (R-Idaho), who voted against the bill, [said](#), "I am very disappointed that we failed to prohibit secretive flights by the federal government over private property. If your property is going to be searched, you have a right to know about it."

In total, 73 amendments were considered for the bill.

Following the bill's passage, there was a great deal of back-patting in celebration.

Senator Pat Roberts (R-Kan.), one of the bill's co-sponsors, praised the legislation in its amended form. "This is a good bill. Is it the best possible bill? No. It is the best bill possible," Roberts said. "And we



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should move, and we should vote for it, and I urge you to vote for it.”

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) encouraged the House to follow suit and pass the Senate farm bill immediately:

I’ve managed quite a few bills in my day — this is a difficult, difficult bill to have in the position we have it in now. I hope that our friends in the House see what we have done. We’re working together; I know that they can.

House Agriculture Committee Chairman Frank Lucas (R-Okla.) is optimistic that the farm bill will meet a similar conclusion in the U.S. House:

Although there will be differences between the Senate approach and our own, I hope my colleagues are encouraged by this success when we meet on the 11th to consider our own legislation. The House Agriculture Committee will consider a balanced proposal that saves taxpayers billions of dollars, recognizes the diversity of American agriculture, respects the risks producers face, and preserves the tools necessary for food production.

The future of the Senate version of the bill in the House appears murky. Most analysts contend that the lower chamber will create its own version of the farm bill. If it passes a different version, the two chambers would be forced to reconcile the two and reach an agreement.

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