

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

FRANK D. LUCAS, CHAIRMAN

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TO: GOP Members, House Committee on Agriculture

FROM: Rep. Frank D. Lucas, Chairman

DATE: July 16, 2013

RE: Next Steps on 2013 Farm Bill

First, I want to thank all of you for your support and tireless efforts in first marking up a farm bill in committee and then helping to pass it on the House floor last week. This was a team effort.

As you know, the development of the 2013 Farm Bill began over three years ago and included more than 40 hearings, two committee mark-ups with over 200 amendments considered, and three days of debate on the House floor with another 100 amendments considered. The result is a product that we can all be very proud of – and one which saves billions of dollars, eliminates over 100 government programs including Direct Payments, and provides the certainty and necessary tools for farmers, ranchers and rural America to prosper.

There certainly have been some bumps in the road over the last few months, and admittedly we have broken with recent tradition by sending the Senate a “Farm-Only Farm Bill.” However, the vote last week was a critical step in completing the bill as soon as possible. The simple fact is we now have a vehicle with which we can put in place a formal process to send a final 2013 Farm Bill to the President for his signature. Any suggestion to the contrary is playing politics with this process and does a disservice to our farmers and ranchers.

The House formally sent H.R. 2642 to the Senate earlier today. Procedurally at this point, the creation of a formal conference committee is in the hands of the Senate. The next step is for the Senate to take up H.R. 2642 and either approve as is or amend it and then send it back to the House requesting a conference. Once that happens the House will have to act again by passing a motion to go to conference and formally appoint conferees. The Speaker will determine the membership of the conference committee when we reach that point. Regardless of these procedural steps, and no matter the outcome of future House consideration of SNAP reform, I am of the opinion that conversations can and will begin immediately with our Senate counterparts on reconciling the agriculture-related titles. Virtually all formal conference committees are preceded by informal, but nevertheless significant, discussions on the important issues by the relevant members of the House and Senate. I expect this conference to be no different.

This week, I will begin meeting with Leader Cantor and interested members on and off the committee on the path forward on reforming SNAP. It is my hope that the House will consider a package of SNAP reforms in the very near future. As you know, SNAP will operate at current levels and within existing rules regardless of farm bill passage. Separating nutrition programs from the rest of the farm bill does not end SNAP, nor does it preclude SNAP reform from being included in a final conference report.

The Senate farm bill is inadequate on a number of fronts beyond providing insufficient reforms to SNAP. The Senate Title I fails what has been my fundamental threshold in the development of the next farm bill: it simply does not work for all commodities in all regions of the country and leaves many producers without a viable safety-net while locking in profits for others.

Additionally, the Senate bill puts in jeopardy our crop insurance system – which we have heard over and over is every producer's top priority – by restricting participation of the most efficient producers and placing unnecessary and burdensome regulations on others. And lastly, the Senate bill does not include any regulatory reforms to help mitigate some of the most onerous regulatory pressures plaguing our nation's farmers, ranchers, and rural communities. These will be difficult issues to overcome with our counterparts in the Senate, but I am confident that if we listen to our producers and do what is right, we will reach agreement and send a five-year farm bill to the President in the coming months.

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