

The Farm Bill: It affects YOU.

What is the Farm Bill?

The “Farm Bill” is the nickname for the broad piece of federal legislation, reauthorized approximately every five years, that creates rules and programs related to many areas of food and agriculture. The current version of the Farm Bill, titled the *Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008*, will be up for reauthorization in 2012. The 2012 Farm Bill presents an important opportunity to shape our food and conservation policies for the next five years.

How does the Farm Bill affect you?

The Farm Bill concerns more than just farms. The Farm Bill impacts all components of our food system; how our rural communities are shaped, how our land and natural resources are managed, how our food is grown and sold, the size of our farms and how far our food must travel to get to our tables, whether our food is safe and properly labeled, and who has access to healthy and affordable food.

One in four Michigan jobs now relies on agriculture. The food and agriculture industry continues to grow in Michigan and is currently the second leading industry contributing \$71 billion to Michigan’s economy. Due to the decline in manufacturing, this sector may soon take the lead. The programs included in the 2012 Farm Bill will have a tremendous impact on Michigan’s economy, cultural identity, and quality of life.

Why is the 2012 Farm Bill important?

The 2012 Farm Bill presents an important opportunity for lawmakers to promote programs that will help revitalize our economy by expanding opportunities to connect farmers and local consumers, removing barriers for beginning farmers, improving the productivity of our workforce by ensuring that all individuals have access to an affordable and healthy diet, and protecting the future quality of our natural resources.

With the current federal budget deficit, there will likely be major cuts to Farm Bill programs. Programs with no baseline funding after 2012 are easy targets and are in danger of disappearing completely. These include many programs related to conservation, nutrition, and beginning farmer and rancher support. Cutting these programs would disproportionately affect low-income consumers, small and mid-size farms, and beginning and minority farmers. It is our responsibility to ensure the protection of these critical programs.

Farm Bill Resources:

- To learn more about the Farm Bill and compare the current Farm Bill with previous legislation, visit the US Department of Agriculture’s Farm Bill website.
www.ers.usda.gov/FarmBill
- To find the full text of the 2008 Farm Bill and other helpful resources, visit The National Agricultural Law Center website.
www.nationalaglawcenter.org/farmbills/#crs
- To learn more about programs with expiring baseline funding, see the CRS report *Previewing the Next Farm Bill: Unfunded and Early-Expiring Provisions*.
<http://www.nationalaglawcenter.org/assets/crs/R41433.pdf>
- Visit the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition website and sign-up for their email list.
www.sustainableagriculture.net/our-work/fbcampaign/
- Visit the Community Food Security Coalition website and sign-up for their email list.
www.foodsecurity.org/2012FarmBill.html
- Visit the Beginning Farmer website and blog.
www.beginningfarmers.org

What key programs are essential for a successful Farm Bill?

A Farm Bill that will create jobs, promote economic development, and improve our quality of life must include programs that will:

Encourage the growth of local and regional food systems

- **Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP)** increases domestic consumption of agricultural commodities by increasing and strengthening direct producer-to-consumer marketing channels through assisting in the development, improvement, and expansion of domestic farmers' markets, roadside stands, community-supported agriculture programs, and other direct producer-to-consumer market opportunities.
- **Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBG)** increases consumption and improves the competitiveness of specialty crops, such as fruits, vegetables, and nuts.
- **Federal-State Marketing Improvement Program (FSMIP)** assists in exploring new market opportunities for U.S. food and agricultural products and encourages research and innovation aimed at improving the efficiency and performance of the marketing system.
- **Value-Added Producer Grant Program (VAPG)** assists eligible producers in developing strategies and business plans to further refine or enhance their products, thereby increasing their value to end users and increasing returns to producers.

Build a new generation of farmers and ranchers

- **Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP)** supports the development of a new generation of farmers and ranchers by making competitive grants to new and established local and regional training, education, outreach, and technical assistance initiatives that address the needs of beginning farmers and ranchers.
- **Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEG)** facilitates the development of small and emerging private business, industry, and related employment for improving the economy in rural communities.
- **Rural Business Opportunity Grant (RBOG)** promotes sustainable economic development in rural communities with exceptional needs through provision of training and technical assistance for business development, entrepreneurs, and economic development officials and to assist with economic development planning.
- **National Organic Certification Cost-share Program (NOCCSP)** is a small reimbursement that helps to reduce the barriers to organic certification and is critical to small, mid-sized, and beginning farmers.

Increase access to affordable, healthy food

- **Community Food Projects Competitive Grants Program (CFPCGP)** supports the development of community food projects designed to meet the food needs of low-income people, increase the self-reliance of communities in providing for their own needs, and promote comprehensive responses to local food, farm, and nutrition issues.
- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)** increases the food budgets of low-income individuals and households, providing critical assistance to many children and seniors and generating economic activity.

Ensure conservation of our natural resources

- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** promotes agricultural production, forest management, and environmental quality as compatible national goals by providing financial and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers to implement conservation practices to address environmental natural resource problems.
- **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)** provides technical and financial assistance to farmers and ranchers to actively manage and maintain existing conservation systems and to implement additional conservation activities on land in agricultural production.
- **Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)** provides matching funds to help purchase development rights to keep productive farm and rangeland in agricultural uses.

To get involved:

- **Contact your legislators!**
To find out who represents you in Congress, visit contactingthecongress.org
- **Write and submit an op-ed or letter to the editor to your local newspaper!**
- **Find an advocacy group in your area and ask how you can join their campaign!**
- **Join FSEP's mailing list at fsepmichigan.org!**