

Farm bill discussions begin in new congress well ahead of 2014 bill expiration

The 2014 Farm Bill is set to expire on Sept. 30, 2019, at the end of the 2018 crop year, but lawmakers are beginning to consider the next iteration of the bill as the new congress convenes in Washington, D.C.

A number of ag groups, ranging from the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) to special interest groups, have begun to consider the implications of the new bill.

The first farm bill hearing will be held by the Senate Agriculture Committee on Feb. 23 in Manhattan, Kans.

House Agriculture Committee Ranking Member Collin Peterson (D-Minn.) has indicated he believes the 2017 bill will be less contentious than past bills.

"I don't think this Farm Bill should be that hard to get done," Peterson told a crop insurance industry meeting on Feb. 6. "We don't have much to fight about, and by and large, what we put together in 2014 is working."

Wyoming input

While many things in the current farm bill have been deemed successful,

Bo Alley of the Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust says that there are several changes he would like to see with the program.

Overall, Alley mentioned, "We'd like to see more localized state control on how funds are managed. We'd also like to see some rollback to some major programs for us."

Alley explained that the 2014 Farm Bill replaced the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) with Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) Agriculture Land Easement (ALE) and Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE), which made it challenging to get easements done in Wyoming, as a result of the institution of a requirement to have a federally controlled management plan on all easements.

"We'd like to see that management plan requirement removed," he continued.

As the second concern, Alley commented that a provision applying to right of enforcement for conservation easements is important.

"We would like to rollback to a contingent right of enforcement," he explained. "If the Natural

Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is a conservation easement holder and the land trust does not uphold its obligations, then NRCS has a contingent right to enforce the easement."

However, the 2014 Farm Bill strengthened that language, giving NRCS an almost automatic right of enforcement, said Alley.

"We'd like to see that automatic right revert to a contingent right of enforcement," Alley said.

For Wyoming, Alley also noted that it would be helpful for language to be modified to remove the current prohibition on mineral development on easements.

Moving forward

"There's a lot of uncertainty right now," Alley said. "Some of our partner land trusts have been in Washington, D.C., and they have begun having these conversations."

Overall, however,

there is an overall concern about budgeting and allocation of dollars for easement programs.

"I think there's some hope to make structural changes, but we have some uncertainty on funding," Alley commented. "We will be working over the next year to really participate with other groups around the country. We're hopeful that we'll begin to see some positive changes and more information in the next six months."

Farm bill hearings will be conducted around the country for the next several months, and with House Agriculture Committee Chairman K. Michael Conaway (R-Texas) indicating that fewer committee hearings will be held in the 115th Congress as compared to the 114th Congress.

With some groups pushing to separate the farm programs from nutrition title, Peterson indicated that

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there is concern from some groups.

"My opinion is that if Republicans decide to separate farm programs and nutrition, there won't be a farm bill," Peterson added.

"We don't have a exact timeline on the passage of the

bill, but the chairman plans to pass the farm bill on time, if not ahead of schedule," emphasized a spokeswoman for Conaway.

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Burlington hosts health workshops

Livestock health is the discussion item Feb. 21 at the second of three monthly lunch sessions at the Burlington Town Hall.

University of Wyoming Extension educators are calling the sessions Farm Cafe.

Weed management is the final topic March 21. All sessions are noon to 1:30 p.m. Lunch is provided.

Cover crops was the January topic.

"The first in this farm café series was very successful, and we look forward to another good event," said Extension Educator Caitlin Youngquist, based in Washakie County. "The format allows for lots of interaction and discussion between participants and specialists."

For more information, contact Extension Educator Chance Marshall in Fremont County at 307-332-2363 or Educator Mae Smith in Big Horn County at 307-765-2868.