

POLICY BRIEF

Congress Begins Work on Next Farm Bill

By [ARTHUR SCOTT](#) Mar. 12, 2018

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ACTION NEEDED:

This year, Congress began laying the foundation for the reauthorization of a new farm bill. Current legislation, the Agriculture Act of 2014 (P.L. 113-79), expires at the end of FY 2018. NACo has already testified before the U.S. House Agriculture Committee in preparatory hearings and continues to work with members of the committee on preserving county priorities in draft language.

Urge your members of congress to support county priorities throughout the development of the next farm bill. Programs throughout the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) help counties make critical investments in infrastructure, workforce and economic development, nutrition and conservation for some of our nation's most underserved communities. Preserving these programs is vital to the strength and stability of our local and national economy.

BACKGROUND:

The 2014 Farm Bill was a major piece of legislation that authorized a broad range of programs that are critical to counties. The legislation contains programs that assist counties in rural development efforts, nutrition assistance programs, conservation initiatives, renewable energy deployment, support for new farmers/ranchers, and business development initiatives. All titles of the farm bill are important to the vitality of our nation.

In June of 2013, the U.S. Senate passed the Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act of 2013 (S. 954) with broad bipartisan support by a vote of 66-27. The U.S. House of Representatives, however, failed to pass their long-term farm bill – The Federal Agriculture Reform and Risk Management Act of 2013 (H.R. 1947) – due to disagreements over funding levels for the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps.

House leadership then separated the nutrition provision of the Farm Bill into a stand-alone title that made \$40 billion in cuts to the SNAP program over the next ten years. The nutrition-only provision passed and was subsequently reattached to the House-passed "farm bill only" bill (H.R. 2642). In February, both chambers voted in favor of the final conference report, sending the bill to the President's desk.

NACo championed the 2014 Farm Bill as it contained several critical county priorities including FY 2014 Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program funding that provides counties with payments to offset forgone tax revenue due to the presence of tax-exempt federal land within their boundaries, reauthorizing vital programs within the rural development title, and protecting county authority over forest roads.

KEY PROVISIONS IN THE 2014 FARM BILL:

The Payments In Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program received a one-year extension at \$425 million for FY2014. PILT provides payments to counties and other local governments to offset losses in tax revenues due to the presence of substantial acreage of federal land in their jurisdictions.

The Rural Development title received \$228 million in mandatory funding including:

\$150 million for the Water and Waste Water Program: Rural Water and Wastewater Programs help counties fund and finance critical water infrastructure and provide access to affordable and clean water to rural communities.

\$63 million for the Value-Added Producer Grant Program: The Value-Added Producer Grant (VAPG) program helps agricultural producers enter into value-added activities related to the processing and/or marketing of new products.

\$15 million for the Rural Microenterprise Assistance Program (RMAP): The Rural Microenterprise Assistance Program provides loans, grants and technical assistance to microloan borrowers and micro entrepreneurs in rural counties.

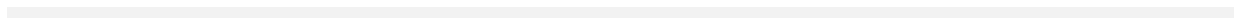
\$100 million for the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program: The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program provides grants to organizations for education, mentoring, and technical assistance initiatives for beginning farmers or ranchers.

The 2014 Farm Bill created the Strategic Economic and Community Development Program championed by NACo in the Rural Development title which allows the U.S. Department of Agriculture to incentivize regional collaboration by prioritizing projects that served as part of a larger multi-jurisdictional economic development plan.

The Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) was funded at \$90 million annually representing a cut of over \$8.7 billion in total over the next ten years. For reference: The Senate farm bill (S.954) proposed \$4.5 billion in cuts over 10 years; the House farm bill (H.R.2642) proposed \$40 billion in cuts over 10 years.

The 2014 Farm Bill also preserved the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's long-standing policy regulating storm water runoff from forest and logging roads under the states' Best Management Practices (BMPs), rather than through the Clean Water Act's (CWA) industrial stormwater permit program, which has tighter and more restrictive requirements than general CWA stormwater permits

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Arthur Scott serves as Associate Legislative Director for NACo's Agriculture and Rural Affairs portfolio, lobbying on a broad range of issues facing rural counties. Arthur also serves as Political Outreach Manager for NACo developing and leveraging strategic partnerships to help address key county priorities in Congress and the Administration.



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