Here it comes again...  

In the coming year, U.S. lawmakers will hash out the details of the 2012 Farm Bill. Over the past 80 years, the farm bill has evolved to encompass a broad array of issues, from conservation to food policy to crop insurance, with vast implications for both rural and urban America. The result of the negotiations will have a significant impact on America’s farms and ranches—and on everyone, because we all rely on food, fiber and other benefits from the nation’s farm and ranch land.

The next farm bill debate will take place at an unprecedented time in American history. Washington is gripped with talk of debt and deficits, and all government spending is under scrutiny. At the same time, prices for most farm commodity crops have reached near-record highs, prompting taxpayers and Congress members to ask why farmers in general need government assistance at all.

The current farm bill (enacted in 2008 as the Food, Conservation and Energy Act) will expire after the 2012 crop year. For the upcoming farm bill, American Farmland Trust is focused on multiple areas, including farmland protection, conservation and stewardship on farms, and farm economic development. Our ultimate goal is to help make sure the next farm bill provides the greatest benefits to our communities and environment while keeping farmers and ranchers on the land.

As the 2012 Farm Bill debate gets fully underway, we offer this primer on the basics.
1. Although only a small percentage of the overall federal budget, the farm bill funds everything from conservation to rural development, with the majority of the money going to nutrition assistance programs. The chart on this page shows where the money goes.

Of the 15 titles in the 2008 farm bill, U.S. food assistance programs represent the largest portion—around 75 percent—of farm bill spending. Even in a climate of budget cuts, food programs are not likely to face significant reductions compared to other components of the farm bill.

2. Out of a U.S. population estimated by the 2010 Census at 308 million people, about 2.2 percent (6.8 million) are farm operators or farm household members.

Farmers and ranchers are central to farm bill programs, and they do work that nearly everyone would agree is vitally important to the nation. But, they increasingly represent a small percentage of the population, which is
Agriculture Committee: has primary jurisdiction over the policy areas included in the farm bill in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate

Average Crop Revenue Election (ACRE): a new program developed by American Farmland Trust and the National Corn Growers Association in the 2008 Farm Bill to provide an alternative to traditional commodity programs, supporting farmers only when their revenue falls below a threshold level

Baseline: the amount of money Congress has available at the start of writing the next farm bill

Commodity: generally means any agricultural product; in farm bill terms, it typically refers to five commodity crops (corn, soybeans, wheat, cotton and rice) that receive most government subsidy payments

Conservation funding: supports programs that help farmers protect clean water, wildlife, wetlands, forests and farm and ranch land

Cost-sharing: a contribution, typically a percentage, required from landowners who participate in government conservation programs

Countercyclical payments: automatic payments to farmers who grow eligible crops (including wheat, corn, sorghum, barley, oats, cotton, soybeans, dry peas, lentils, chickpeas and peanuts) whenever market prices fall below a target price

Crop insurance: federal insurance available for most farmers and ranchers to purchase in the event of natural disasters or loss of income due to a decline in commodity prices; now the largest farm safety net program

Direct payment: fixed annual payments available to farmers who grow commodity crops (including wheat, corn, grain sorghum, barley, oats, cotton, rice and soybeans) regardless of current market price or yield; on the chopping block in the next farm bill

Discretionary funding: funding for bills not deemed a priority by Congress and thus subject to cutting yearly due to budget constraints; conservation funding typically falls into this category

Easement programs: voluntary programs that pay farmers and ranchers to not develop their land; includes the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP) and the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)

Land retirement programs: voluntary programs, such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), that remove environmentally sensitive land from crop production and reconvert it back into forests, grasslands or wetlands

Mandatory funding: funding for bills that are flagged as priorities by Congress; farm subsidies and food stamp programs are usually marked with this status

Nutrition programs: account for more than 75 percent of farm bill spending; the primary nutrition assistance program is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps

Safety net: a set of farm programs and other assistance to protect farmers and ranchers from risks such as lost income or devastation from natural disasters

Specialty crops: fruits, vegetables and nuts

Subsidies: government payments to farmers established during the Great Depression to protect the nation’s food supply; today, they primarily go only to producers of a small number of commodity crops

USDA: the United States Department of Agriculture; the farm bill determines the majority of the USDA budget

Food system: includes all processes and infrastructure involved in feeding a population, including growing, harvesting, processing, packaging, transporting, marketing, consumption and disposal of food and food-related items

Working lands programs: voluntary programs providing farmers with technical and financial assistance to improve land management practices; includes the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
THE 15 TITLES of the Farm Bill

**Title I, Commodities**: provides income support to growers of select commodities, including wheat, corn and other feed grains, cotton, rice, oilseeds, peanuts, sugar and dairy

**Title II, Conservation**: provides funding for farm environmental stewardship through programs that improve farm management practices, retire land, and protect farmland and other natural resources

**Title III, Agricultural Trade and Food Aid**: funds U.S. agriculture export and international food assistance programs and various World Trade Organization obligations (WTO)

**Title IV, Nutrition**: covers domestic food and nutrition and commodity distribution programs, such as food stamps and supplemental nutrition assistance as well as purchases of fresh fruit and vegetables in schools and expanded programs for farmers markets and urban gardens

**Title V, Farm Credit**: offers direct and guaranteed loan programs to farmers via two government-related farm lenders, the USDA Farm Service Agency and the Farm Credit System

**Title VI, Rural Development**: funds rural development loan and grant programs, the expansion of rural broadband access, water infrastructure projects and promotes locally produced agricultural food products

**Title VII, Research**: supports agricultural research and extension programs, including bio-security and response, biotechnology and organic production

**Title VIII, Forestry**: funds USDA Forest Service programs that protect forests from threats, restore forests damaged by natural disasters and enhance public benefits from private forests

**Title IX, Energy**: supports the development of biofuel refineries and research; helps farmers, ranchers and rural small businesses purchase renewable energy systems

**Title X, Horticulture and Organic Agriculture**: encourages the production and consumption of fruits, vegetables and nuts and supports organic agriculture

**Title XI, Livestock**: addresses livestock disease prevention and food safety concerns and enhances electronic mandatory livestock reporting

**Title XII, Crop Insurance and Disaster Assistance**: protects farmers from risks associated with adverse weather, weather-related plant diseases and insect infestations

**Title XIII, Commodity Futures**: covers reauthorization of the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, an independent agency that regulates commodity futures trading in the United States

**Title XIV, Miscellaneous**: expands programs to assist limited-resource and socially disadvantaged farmers and addresses rural development, agricultural labor supply and animal welfare

**Title XV, Trade and Taxes**: introduces numerous tax provisions affecting conservation and commodity program payments, timber investment, biofuel production and agricultural income
why American Farmland Trust works to bring together divergent groups with shared interests in support of conservation and our other farm bill priorities.

3. In the U.S. House of Representatives, it takes 218 members (a simple majority) to pass a farm bill. According to the 2007 Census of Agriculture, more than one-third of U.S. House of Representatives members represent fewer than 1,500 farmers in their districts. Supporters of the many policy areas involved in the farm bill—from nutrition to food policy to conservation—alone do not garner enough support in Congress for an initiative to pass unless they join forces with supporters of other policy initiatives. That’s why bringing together various groups with shared interests in farm and food policy is an important role for American Farmland Trust.

4. The farm bill impacts more than 40 percent of the nation’s land area.
   According to the 2007 Census of Agriculture, farmers manage 40.8 percent of the nation’s total land area (i.e. the amount of land in all fifty states classified as “land in farms”). That excludes the vast majority of federal grazing lands. When considering the 48 contiguous states, farmers manage 48.7 percent of the land. That means the nation can’t solve any of its environmental problems without working with farmers and ranchers, and the biggest place to make an impact is in the farm bill.

5. Over the last 25 years, we have lost more than 23 million acres of farmland (an area roughly the size of Indiana) to sprawling development.
   The farm bill is a major source of support for farmland protection through the federal Farm and Ranch Lands
Protection Program (FRPP), which helps states and municipalities purchase easements to protect working lands. The program is ever more critical at a time when farmers and ranchers are needed to help address the nation’s environmental challenges while growing food for the nation and world.

According to the 2007 U.S. Census of Agriculture, there are more than five times as many farmers at age 65 and older as there are 35 and younger.

Farmers aged 55 and older own nearly 416 million acres of farm and ranch land—land that will likely change ownership in the next 20 years.

Increased funding is needed for farm bill programs that can help farmers and ranchers protect their land and pass it on to the next generation, and for programs that help beginning and young farmers enter the business and keep their operations viable.
### U.S. Farmers Are Aging

There are more than five times as many principal farm operators 65 and older as there are 35 and younger.

*Source: 2007 U.S. Census of Agriculture, Tables 49 and 63*

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<th>Age Group</th>
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In the coming months, we will have the opportunity to rethink our public investment in agriculture.

American Farmland Trust’s goal is a smart farm bill that provides the greatest benefit to communities while keeping farmers and ranchers on the land and helping them to manage it well.

American Farmland Trust’s top priorities for the 2012 Farm Bill are:

➤ Protect farmland as a strategic national resource
➤ Allow more farmers and ranchers to benefit from farm policies and better target policies to benefit farmers who need support
➤ Encourage and reward sound environmental stewardship through better agricultural practices and markets that pay farmers to produce environmental goods and services
➤ Encourage the development of a more diverse and viable food system
➤ Strengthen America’s commitment to healthy food by increasing its consumption and production
➤ Reduce the environmental impacts caused by the current subsidy system while providing farmers and ranchers with a solid safety net through an expansion of the ACRE program
It is estimated that we need at least an additional 13 million acres of farmland growing fruits and vegetables in order for Americans to meet the minimum daily requirement of fruits and vegetables set by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Last year, the USDA’s Report of the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans called for Americans to incorporate even more fruits and vegetables into their diet. But the majority of the nation’s fruits and vegetables are grown in the path of development. The need for 13 million more acres underscores the need to protect farming on the urban edge and support programs that promote farmers markets, healthy eating and farmers who grow specialty crops.

In 2011, 50 percent of farmers applying to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, 40 percent of farmers applying to the Grassland Reserve Program, and 33 percent of farmers applying to the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program were turned away due to lack of funding.

Conservation programs, which help farmers and ranchers protect our natural resources, are chronically underfunded. Although conservation programs represent only seven percent of total agricultural spending, they are often among the first to be targeted for the chopping block during the farm bill process and take some of the largest hits. But they are vastly important to the short- and long-term health and vitality of the nation.

In the Upper Mississippi River basin alone, 36 million acres (62 percent of the cropland in the watershed) are “under-treated,” meaning they currently do not have adequate conservation practices in place to prevent the loss of soil and nutrients, according to a report from the USDA.

The report estimates that a combination of fairly common conservation practices could make substantial progress toward lessening pollution in the watershed. Changes in agricultural practices are among the most cost-effective...
means for addressing water quality, which is why farm bill conservation programs are such a good investment.

10. Hunger and the expanding food crisis will increase demands on America’s farms and farmland, as the world’s population is expected to reach nine billion people by 2050.

   America’s farmers will need to help feed a rising world population on a diminishing land base.

   On top of that, rapidly changing environmental conditions and increased natural disasters from climate change could severely impact agricultural production in the future. Not long ago, agricultural economist Michael Roberts told a Capitol Hill briefing that the current global trend of rising average temperatures could dramatically reduce crop yields within a decade—and major crops such as corn and soybeans could be diminished by 20 percent from 2020 to 2049.

   That’s why we need increased investments in farmland protection, agricultural research and programs that help farmers and ranchers adopt the most cutting-edge conservation practices. We have to protect our resources now so we’ll have them for the future.

Learn More!

For more details about the 2012 Farm Bill, and AFT’s ongoing work to transform U.S. farm and food policy, please visit www.farmland.org/farmbill.

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