

# Stabenow: Budget Would Endanger Farm Bill 'If Taken Seriously'

By Teaganne Finn | February 12, 2018 08:16PM ET | Bloomberg BNA

- Fiscal 2019 budget for USDA would request \$19 billion in discretionary spending, a 16 percent decrease from 2017 enacted levels
- Ranking Agriculture Democrat Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.) said budget would endanger farm bill “if taken seriously”

(Bloomberg Law) -- Ag lawmaker reaction to President Donald J. Trump's proposed fiscal 2019 farm and food aid budget proposals ranged from non-committal to saying the proposals threatened to sink the legislative prospects for the upcoming farm bill.

“The proposed cuts to both the USDA and the Farm Bill would hurt American agriculture, neglect rural businesses, and leave families and seniors behind. This is especially troubling given the state of the fragile rural economy,” said Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich), the ranking Democrat on the Senate Agriculture Committee, in a statement. “If taken seriously, this budget would make it impossible for Congress to pass a Farm Bill this year.”

The White House's Office of Management and Budget released Trump's budget request on Feb. 12 that includes an Agriculture Department budget request for \$19 billion in discretionary funding—a 16 percent decrease from the 2017 enacted levels.

The budget also proposed cuts to mandatory spending programs, including crop insurance and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The budget request would cut crop insurance premium subsidies by more than \$22 billion and would achieve \$213 billion in savings from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program over the next 10 years.

Chairmen of the House and Senate Agriculture Committees, Rep. Mike Conaway (R-Texas) and Sen. Pat Roberts (R-Kan.) issued a joint statement that did not criticize the proposals but expressed support for a farm “safety net” and “continuing to improve our nation's nutrition programs.”

“As Chairmen of the Agriculture Committees, the task at hand is to produce a Farm Bill for the benefit of our farmers, ranchers, consumers and other stakeholders,” they said in a joint statement. “This budget, as with every other president's budget before, will not prevent us from doing that job.”

Overall, the budget proposed \$48 billion in farm bill savings over the next 10 years. The current legislation is set to expire Sept. 30.

Deja Vu

Zack Clark, National Farmers Union's director of government relations, told Bloomberg Government Feb. 12, the budget's proposed cuts to farm support programs like crop insurance are problematic for agriculture producers.

"We're looking at a farm economy that needs help from the administration," said Clark. "The President's budget doesn't do that."

The budget proposal would hit the crop insurance program by reducing premium subsidies from 62 percent to 48 percent and limit commodity, conservation, and crop insurance subsidies to those producers that have an Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) of \$500,000 or less.

According to the budget request, cutting the premium subsidies would save more than \$22 billion over a decade and limiting eligibility for agricultural commodity payments would generate another \$1 billion in savings.

"I think the initial thought is disappointment," Tara Smith, vice president of federal affairs at Michael Torrey Associates LLC, a government affairs firm that focuses on agriculture and food, told Bloomberg Government.

Smith said this proposal is similar to Trump's fiscal year 2018 budget proposal, which requested to reduce premium subsidies to \$40,000 and limit the popular harvest price option for crop insurance.

"We've seen [House and Senate] Chairs and ranking members dismiss these types of proposals because they understand the importance of crop insurance," said Smith.

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