

National Affairs and Legislation Committee
The Garden Club of America
113th Congress, 1st Session — November 5, 2013

Update #8

**Farm Bill Goes to Conference—It's Time
to Ask Your Legislators to Defend Three Important
Conservation Provisions in the Senate Bill**

What you can do:

- Check the list of conferees below. If your representative or senator is listed, please share your concerns with her or him and stress the vital importance of protecting land, water and wildlife habitats in our nation's vast farming areas.
- If your legislator is not on the list, it still doesn't hurt to send a message, by email, voice mail or personal contact, about how important it is to the garden club to preserve a strong conservation program in the farm bill. Your legislator probably will interact with farm bill conferees and spread the word, especially if it seems that there is a lot of genuine grass roots concern.

The farm bill conference has begun at last:

It has taken far too long,¹ but the House and Senate have now begun conferencing the farm bill. Both House and Senate bills have many elements in common. But it is the *differences* between them that will be resolved in conference. Here are the key areas about which we are concerned:

1. We want to see a strong and well-funded conservation title, to use the words in our GCA Position Paper on Sustainable Agriculture, Seed Diversity and Food Security. Both bills provide for consolidating nearly two dozen separate agriculture conservation programs into a dozen programs. There have already been \$3 billion in farm bill conservation program reductions since the 2008 farm bill. The House bill would reduce total conservation program funding by yet another \$7 billion, twice as much as the \$3.5 billion reduction in the Senate bill. Therefore, we urge conferees to accept the Senate level.
2. Linkage: The Senate bill would require farmers to adhere to sound agricultural land and water conservation practices in order to qualify for federal crop insurance subsidies, thereby restoring a provision that was first enacted in the 1984 farm bill. Ducks Unlimited, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, the Nature Conservancy and other conservation groups are strongly in favor of restoring this linkage. Our GCA Position Paper on Sustainable Agriculture explicitly mentions our support for riparian, wetlands, and other agricultural conservation practices. The House declined to include the linkage requirement; members cited the conservation requirements as “unduly burdensome regulations.” Therefore we support the Senate version with its linkage requirement.

¹ If you want to review the excruciatingly long road leading to the conference, check Legislative Updates #3 and #4 and the October 18, 2013 Current Status Chart.

3. Sod-busters: The Senate bill would limit crop insurance subsidies for the first few years on lands that have been newly plowed up for new crop land. The House bill would restrict subsidies only in the Prairie Pothole region of the Upper Midwest. We favor protecting prime grasslands and native prairie and therefore prefer the Senate's broader sod-buster provisions.

There are a number of other highly contentious issues of difference between Senate and House bills that will occupy legislators. Among them: the SNAP nutrition programs, the level of crop insurance subsidy, the support levels for specific commodity crops, farm energy and others. These are not garden club issues and our NAL and Conservation Committees have not been involved in them.

List of conferees:

<i>Democrats</i>	<i>Republicans</i>
SENATE AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE	
Sen. Debbie Stabenow, Michigan, Chair	Sen. Thad Cochran, Mississippi, Ranking
Sen. Patrick Leahy, Vermont	Sen. Pat Roberts, Kansas
Sen. Tom Harkin, Iowa	Sen. Saxby Chambliss, Georgia
Sen. Sherrod Brown, Ohio	Sen. John Boozman, Arkansas
Sen. Amy Klouchar, Minnesota	Sen. John Hoeven, North Dakota
Sen. Michael Bennet, Colorado	
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES	
Rep. Colin Peterson, Minnesota, Ranking	Rep. Frank Lucas, Oklahoma, Chair
Rep. Mick McIntyre, North Carolina	Rep. Steve King, Iowa
Rep. Jim Costa, California	Rep. Randy Neugebauer, Texas
Rep. Tim Walz, Minnesota	Rep. Mike Rogers, Alabama
Rep. Kurt Shradler, Oregon	Rep. Michael Conaway, Texas
Rep. Jim McGovern, Massachusetts	Rep. Glenn GT Thompson, Pennsylvania
Rep. Suzan DelBene, Washington	Rep. Austin Scott, Georgia
Rep. Gloria Negrete McLeod, California	Rep. Rick Crawford, Arkansas
Rep. Filemon Vela, Texas	Rep. Martha Roby, Alabama
Rep. Marcia Fudge, Ohio	Rep. Rep. Kristi Noem, South Dakota
Rep. Eliot Engel, New York (Foreign Affairs Comm)	Rep. Jeff Denham, California
Rep. Sandy Levin, Michigan (Ways and Means Comm.)	Rep. Rodney Davis, Illinois
	Rep. Steve Southerland, Florida
	Rep. Ed Royce, California (Foreign Affairs)
	Rep. Tom Marino, Pennsylvania
	Rep. Dave Camp, Michigan (Ways & Means)
	Rep. Sam Johnson, Texas

Deadlines:

If Congress doesn't enact a new farm bill by January 1, many of the agricultural provisions will expire and others will revert to 1938 and 1949 permanent law farm price and subsidy levels which make no sense in today's market. This would threaten the welfare of farmers and consumers alike. Congress has already resorted to an inadequate partial one-year extension of selected programs to keep key farm supports in place for 2013 even while stranding other programs. Farmers need a full five-year extension, especially if they plan to undertake serious conservation efforts.

There is also "inside baseball" tactical pressure. To end the budget/debt/government shutdown debacle, Congress agreed to go to conference on the House- and Senate-passed budget resolutions. The budget conference deadline is December 13. At a minimum, legislators hope to come up with sufficient savings to replace the scheduled

January 15, 2014 budget sequester. One of the potentially largest chunks of budget savings is the farm bill with tens of billions of dollars over ten years in savings from reductions in farm subsidies, conservation programs and nutrition assistance. If the Agriculture conferees don't move briskly to reach agreement on a farm bill, there is a possibility that the budget conference will hi-jack their bill and use its savings in the budget/debt chess game. Sen. Stabenow and Rep. Lucas, chairs of the Senate and House Agriculture Committees, vow that they will not let this happen—they say the agriculture conference should write the farm bill, not the budget conference. Time will tell.

How to contact your legislators:

To send e-mail to your senator, go to http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm and scroll to the senator's name. There you will see a "web form" address in red type. Click on that address and follow the directions for sending e-mail.

To send email to your representative, go to <https://writerep.house.gov/writerep/welcome.shtml>

To telephone any legislator, call the Capitol switchboard: 202-224-3121. Ask for your senator's office by name. When the phone is answered, say that you want to leave a message about an issue. A very young aide will take the message or send you to the legislator's voice mail. This seems impersonal, but is nevertheless effective—legislators keep track of how many calls come in on different issues and the direction in which sentiment is running. Even a relatively small number of calls are enough to warrant serious consideration of the views expressed.

NAL updates serve in an **advisory capacity**, based on committee research. Individual clubs and members may act on any issue as they choose. Editors: Martha Phillips (mhphillips@optonline.net) and Suzanne Canfield (sbc@sbcandfield.com). All e-mails and faxes are sent from GCA Headquarters. To unsubscribe: Contact Sarah at GCA Headquarters, 212-753-8287, or sarah.frelinghuysen@gcamerica.org