

The 2026 Farm Bill Returns: House Republicans Unveil Farm Bill 2.0

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Overview

The long-awaited sequel to the American agricultural policy saga has finally arrived. Earlier this week, House Agriculture Committee Republicans, led by Chairman Glenn “GT” Thompson (R-PA), released an 800-page draft of the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026.

Formally dubbed “Farm Bill 2.0” by committee leadership, the draft surfaces after a high-stakes legislative dance that saw much of the traditional farm bill’s funding, specifically for crop insurance and safety net programs, carved out and passed in last year’s One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA). What remains in this 800-page document is the other 80 percent of policy that involves the contentious, culture-war-adjacent issues that are now setting the stage for a dramatic Feb. 23 markup.

A Tale of Two Chambers: The Strategy Divide

While House Republicans are charging forward with a draft that Democrats claim rejects 90 percent of their proposals, the view from the Senate is decidedly more cautious. Senate Agriculture Chair John Boozman (R-AR) has already signaled that he views several items in the House draft as “poison pills.”

His strategy appears to involve stripping the most contentious provisions to ensure a bipartisan path forward. This creates a sharp divide: a House GOP looking to plant a flag on conservative priorities versus a Senate GOP looking to clear the field for a final, signed law.

SNAP and the “MAHA” movement. Perhaps the most significant shift in the House draft is the formal marriage of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) with the administration’s “Make America Healthy Again” (MAHA) agenda.

- **Junk Food Restrictions:** Building on waivers already granted to 12 states, the bill seeks to formalize restrictions on using SNAP benefits for “unhealthy” items like soda and highly processed snacks.
- **Work Requirements:** The bill reinforces the expanded work requirements passed in the OBBBA, requiring able-bodied adults up to age 64 to engage in 80 hours of work or training per month to maintain benefits.
- **The Debate:** Supporters argue this restores SNAP to its “nutritional roots” and protects taxpayer dollars. Critics, however, argue it creates a “nutritional surveillance state” that complicates shopping for low-income families and ignores the root causes of food insecurity.



The Argument FOR (Supporters)	The Argument AGAINST (Critics)
Public Health: Aligns SNAP with the “Make America Healthy Again” (MAHA) goal to reduce diet-related chronic diseases.	The “Surveillance State”: Creates a “nutritional surveillance state” that tracks and judges every item in a family’s grocery cart.
Taxpayer Value: Argues that taxpayer dollars shouldn’t subsidize “junk food” (soda/candy) that increases long-term Medicaid costs.	Administrative Chaos: Defining “healthy” is a moving target; stores would face massive technical hurdles to block specific UPC codes.
Work Integrity: Raising work requirements to age 64 ensures the program remains a temporary safety net, not a lifestyle.	Unfair Targets: Low-income families often live in “food deserts” where fresh produce is more expensive or unavailable.

The battle over Proposition 12 and interstate commerce. The draft takes a direct shot at California’s Proposition 12, which mandates specific living conditions for livestock if their meat is to be sold within the state. The House bill includes language stating that states cannot require production standards for products produced outside their borders. For the pork industry, this is a “federal fix” to a “patchwork of 50 different state laws.” For animal rights advocates and proponents of states’ rights, it is a federal overreach that nullifies the will of voters.

This is a battle over the “Commerce Clause” of the Constitution – specifically, whether one state (California) can dictate how a farmer not located in California raises pigs.

The Industry View (Pro-Fix)	The Advocacy View (Anti-Fix)
Market Stability: Prevents a “patchwork” of 50 different state laws that would force farmers to build different barns for different states.	States’ Rights: Nullifies the democratic will of California voters who chose more humane standards for the food sold in their state.
Lowering Prices: Claims Prop 12 has spiked pork prices in California by as much as 20%, hurting low-income consumers.	Pulling the Rug: Many farmers have already spent millions of dollars upgrading their facilities to be compliant; a fix makes those investments worthless.
Animal Welfare: Maintains that “individualized care” (stalls) is often safer for sows than the “group housing” mandated by California.	Standard of Care: Argues that banning extreme confinement is a necessary baseline for modern, ethical food production.

Foreign farmland and national security. Reflecting growing concerns over foreign influence in American food systems, the bill increases reporting requirements for foreign entities purchasing U.S. agricultural land and adds the Secretary of Agriculture as a permanent member of the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS).

Conservation and pesticides. The bill reauthorizes the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) but maintains a strict cap of 27 million acres, a move designed to balance environmental stewardship with the need to keep productive land in use. Additionally, the draft pushes for uniform pesticide labeling, which would prohibit states from requiring warning labels that are more stringent than federal EPA standards – a major priority for the chemical and crop protection industry and is designed to abrogate a 2005 U.S. Supreme Court opinion (at least in part) and be a preemptive strike against a forthcoming Supreme Court opinion this term on the issue.



Specialty Crops: A Billion-Dollar “Bridge”

While the House debates the long-term Farm Bill, the USDA is moving rapidly to address immediate financial pain in the specialty crop sector. Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins recently announced \$1 billion in “Assistance for Specialty Crop Farmers” (ASCF).

Program	Target Audience	Key Deadline
FBA (Farmer Bridge Assistance)	Row Crop Producers (Corn, Soy, Wheat)	Rollout Feb. 23
ASCF (Assistance for Specialty Crop Farmers)	Fruits, Nuts, Vegetables, Sugar	March 13 (Acreage Reporting)

The ASCF is a one-time payment designed to help growers of everything from almonds to avocados who were left out of previous row-crop-heavy aid packages. However, industry groups have already noted that the \$1 billion figure may only be a “drop in the bucket” compared to the billions lost due to international trade issue and high input costs triggered by prior national economic policies.

What's Next?

The House Agriculture Committee will begin marking up this measure on Monday, Feb. 23. The proceedings are expected to be marathon sessions, likely to last until the night of the State of the Union.

Conclusion

While few expect this 800-page draft to become law in its current form, its release is a critical “starting gun.” It defines the Republican negotiating position and forces the Senate to respond. For farmers and ranchers, the message is clear – while the farm safety net has been substantially strengthened, fine tuning is still very much in progress. As the markup process begins next week, I will be watching for amendments that might bridge the gap between the House and Senate. And...there may be a couple of key tax provisions that get tucked in. A little birdie told me that one.

Stay tuned.

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