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Opinion

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OUR VIEW

New farm bill comes down to a SNAP

Farm groups are anxious to have a farm bill passed by the lame duck Congress. That still seems possible, but a contentious difference between the House and Senate versions of the bill regarding nutrition programs seems to be one of the big holdups.

It's no surprise to us that it is the welfare program that is again holding up the farm bill.

The 2014 Farm Bill expired at the end of September. Both House and Senate agriculture committee leaders had vowed that new legislation would be passed in time to replace it.

The House passed its bill June 21, and the Senate followed a week later with its own version. That left more than three months for a conference committee to work out the differences and get a bill passed before the deadline.

There are some major differences between the bills. The Senate bill, for example, sought



The U.S. Capitol

to limit the amount of payments available to any one farming operation. The House bill, on the other hand, made it easier for more family members within a farming operation to qualify for payments.

But one of the most contentious differences is

in provisions regarding the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the \$70 billion-a-year welfare program formerly known as food stamps.

The House bill tightens work requirements for SNAP recipients, forcing most adult recipients under 60 who don't

have children under 6 years old to prove each month that they have worked or participated in a work program or are exempt. It passed with only a two-vote margin and without a single Democrat vote.

No such provisions were included in the Senate version. Republicans on the Senate

Ag Committee say the work requirement is a nonstarter in the Senate, where 60 votes are required to close debate and bring a measure to a vote.

So once again, it appears the nutrition program has brought progress on the bill to a halt.

Decades ago Congress decided to put food stamp and school lunch funding into the farm bill. The thinking goes that urban legislators don't really care much for commodity subsidies, crop insurance and dairy pricing, but they do care about nutrition programs that impact their constituents. Lumped in with the welfare programs urban legislators do care about, the farm expenditures seem like small potatoes that aren't worth a fight.

We admit there was probably some logic behind that thinking. But in practice, the thing that was supposed to grease the skids seems to always throw the farm bill off the rails.

OUR VIEW

Give thanks for the miracle of agriculture



The subject of food always sparks a lively conversation these days. Everyone seems to have a unique perspective on what's right — and wrong — with our food. No matter how food is produced, someone will have something to say about it: How and where it's grown and what's in it.

And that's fine. The marketplace ultimately sorts that out.

But one thing you never hear is that there's not enough food. Think about it. Every day, 326 million people in the U.S. eat three meals. That's 356,970,000 meals this year. And last year, and the year before, going back as far as anyone can remember. Any hunger that has ever existed in the U.S. was not because of a lack of food production.

Often a discussion about agriculture circles around to the "food system." We're not real sure what that is. In our eyes, food is not produced by a "system," it's produced by farmers and ranchers, 2.1 million of them, who get out of bed every morning to work the land and tend the herds and flocks. Together, they cultivate and graze 922 million acres to raise about \$400 billion worth of crops and livestock each year.

An interesting factoid is that the amount of food

produced in the U.S. has gone up as the number of farmers and ranchers has gone down.

That's not a "system." That's a miracle. Yet everyone seems to take the bounty for granted. Most of the public still believes food comes from the supermarket or that Old MacDonald grew it.

The fact is, most farmers and ranchers devote their lives to producing food and fiber. They use technology, the latest research and innovative production techniques to do it. Most of them grew up on a farm or ranch. They learned farming not only at a land-grant college or university but from their parents and grandparents.

That's why there's more to farming than meets the eye. Yes, it's a business, but it's also a way of life that has been passed down through generations, all the way back before the founding of the republic. In fact, farming can be traced back 12,000 years to the beginnings of civilization.

This week Americans celebrated with a day of thanks. For family, for shelter and for the many blessings we enjoy in this great nation.

We all have much for which to be grateful. Among them is the fact that we in the U.S. are the beneficiaries of a miracle. We live in a land of plenty, and we have farmers and ranchers to thank for it.

How — and why — to save the family farm

By DOUG KRAHMER
and BRUCE TAYLOR
For the Capital Press



Guest comment

Oregon farmers and ranchers face many challenges. In a global economy, they often cannot be assured of a decent price. In a changing climate, they might get too much or too little water in any given year. Added to that, they often face uncertainty over how their land will pass to the next generation.

Farmland in Oregon is changing hands — fast. Two-thirds of Oregon's agricultural lands — more than 10 million acres — will change hands in the next 20 years, according to research from Oregon State University. The same research tells us that up to 80 percent of Oregon farmers and ranchers may not have a succession plan.

In this transition, productive agricultural lands may be subdivided into parcels too small to keep in production. Or they may be converted to non-farm uses like residential or commercial development. Oregon won't just be losing agricultural land — we will be losing our farming heritage and important habitat for native fish and wildlife.

All of that's bad for farmers, bad for our economy, bad for our environment, and bad for quality of life.

Last year, a bipartisan coalition in the legislature came together to solve this problem by creating the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program to help farmers and rural communities plan for the future. The new program aims to provide grants that help Oregon's farmers and ranchers plan for generational succession, and protect or enhance the agricultural and conservation values of their land.

The next step happened 10 months ago, when the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Commission was formed — made up of 12 leaders representing Oregon's farming, ranching, conservation and tribal communities. Since then, they have volunteered hundreds of hours developing the program.

But one of the key pieces of this puzzle is unfinished: the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program will remain an empty promise until the Legislature funds its implementation. If we want to provide reliability for Oregon's farms and ranches, and the rural communities

and fish and wildlife that depend on them, we need to invest in their future.

Investing state funds in our agricultural heritage will also mean that Oregon can finally access the growing pot of federal Farm Bill funds available to protect U.S. ag land. Each year, Oregon leaves millions of federal dollars on the table because we do not have a state grant program to match this USDA funding. Dedicating state funds to Oregon's agricutural heritage will help us access these federal investments for our communities, families, and fish and wildlife. It will also demonstrate the state's commitment to our rural communities.

Working lands support many different kinds of fish and wildlife habitats. Sagebrush habitat on large ranches is critical for sage grouse. Flood-irrigated hay meadows in southeast Oregon sustain seasonal wetlands for migratory birds. Oak woodlands and savannas support almost 200 species of wildlife.

And streams and rivers crisscross most working lands, providing fish habitat and wildlife corridors. Keeping farmers and ranchers who are good stewards of these lands in business through generational changes will help maintain these important habitats.

Gov. Kate Brown showed her support for this program by convening the work group of agricultural and conservation interests that developed the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program. The legislature showed its support last session by providing funding to set up the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Commission. We now need our governor and legislators to invest \$10 million in the 2019-2021 state budget to finally put this program to work. This is an investment in our agricultural heritage, working lands and wildlife, local economies, and Oregon's way of life — big changes are coming, and we need to act now.

Doug Kraemer is chairman of the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Commission. Bruce Taylor is vice chairman of the commission.

Letters policy

Write to us: Capital Press welcomes letters to the editor on issues of interest to farmers, ranchers and the agribusiness community.

Letters policy: Please limit letters to 300 words and include your home address and a daytime telephone number with your submission. Longer pieces, 500-750 words, may be considered as guest commentary pieces for use on the opinion pages. Guest commentary submissions should also include a photograph of the author.

Send letters via email to opinions@capitalpress.com. Emailed letters are preferred and require less time to process, which could result in quicker publication. Letters also may be sent to P.O. Box 2048, Salem, OR 97308; or by fax to 503-370-4383.