

Farm Program Integrity Act Introduced:

Senators Chuck Grassley (R-IA), Tim Johnson (D-SD), Mike Enzi (R-WY), and Sherrod Brown (D-OH) have introduced a bipartisan bill that would place a hard cap on farm program payments and closes current loopholes to ensure payments go to working farmers. Due to current program eligibility loopholes, mega farms and absentee investors can currently receive an unlimited government check through farm programs.

The Farm Program Integrity Act, which reflects language approved by the U.S. Senate in 2012, would restore integrity and fiscal responsibility in federal farm policy during this time of budgetary constraints.

"Adoption of the Farm Program Integrity Act would put an end to widespread abuse in farm programs," according to National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC) Policy Director Ferd Hoefner. "As currently structured, farm programs make mega payments to mega farms and absentee passive investors, subsidizing farm consolidation and the demise of family farms. This Act ensures that scarce federal dollars would flow to working farmers instead of to passive investors and general partners whose primary purpose in the operation is simply to collect additional government checks." The bill would allow for payments to working farmers plus one additional manager per farm.

NSAC and the farmers it represents urge the Senate to adopt this policy again, as it did last year, during consideration of a new farm bill. The House Agriculture Committee did not adopt these common-sense reforms, a situation NSAC hopes will change this year.

"Instead of putting an end to waste and fraud in farm programs, the House Agriculture Committee kept intact high caps and wide-open loopholes in the farm bill they voted out of Committee last year," said Hoefner.

"We want to work with the House Committee and the full House to ensure a sound and fiscally responsible farm safety net in the upcoming five-year farm bill debate. The Senate bill introduced today is an excellent place to start. The prospects for actually getting a new five-year bill enacted this year will be much improved if the dual principles reflected in the Farm Program Integrity Act - directing benefits to working farmers with reasonable caps - guide all farm safety net program deliberations."

(From National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, Feb. 12, 2014)