

Farm Bill Expires Sunday, Fears of No Pass of 2012 Bill

With Congress adjourned, fears that a 2012 farm bill wouldn't pass before the Sept. 30 deadline have now become a reality.

Although political wrangling has been at a maximum recently, Shawn Wade, director of policy analysis and research for Plains Cotton Growers, said area producers won't wake up Monday morning to an Agricultural Armageddon.

"They need to pass a farm bill and we want that to happen, but when this one expires Sunday, it won't be the end of the world," he said. "Our cotton and peanut producers on the South Plains probably won't notice much change on Monday morning."

Wade said most of the spending authorized for the 2012 crop is already in place and any new programs that might be in a Farm Bill would not be in play immediately anyway.

"Any payments that growers need to operate that would be affected by a new Farm Bill would not occur until a calendar year away, so there is time for Congress to pass a bill and if needed, make parts of it retroactive," Wade said. "The federal crop insurance program includes its own authorizing statutes, so those programs will be in place in time for planting the 2013 crop."

This situation is not unprecedented.

The 2002 Farm Bill was allowed to expire at the end of 2007 and the 2008 Farm Bill was not enacted until June of that year.

"As we saw in the 2008 bill and its delay, we were able to

push through all the sign ups for the programs we needed, but nobody thinks this bill will take until June to get finalized," Wade added. "Most indications are that it will be dealt with in the lame duck session after the November elections."

Although there's no guarantee, lawmakers could still get it done after Election Day, but the bill still could take many different forms.

The current bill could be extended for a year. There could be an entirely new bill.

Another possibility is a hybrid of the two, with passage of a new bill, but an extension of the current legislation to allow time for policy changes.

Typically, if a full farm bill isn't passed before the deadline, Congress has voted in a short-term extension.

That didn't happen this time and Congressman Randy Neugebauer, R-Lubbock, said in an e-mail to constituents this week that he was not happy about that.

"The 2008 Farm Bill will expire on September 30, and Congress has left Washington without passing a new policy," he said in the e-mail. "I'm incredibly disappointed that we didn't get this done. The House Agriculture Committee passed a Farm Bill that made real reforms and reduced spending while still ensuring our farmers have a safety net to carry them through bad seasons."

The congressman said he supported that version of the bill, which resulted in \$35 billion in savings, eliminated or consolidated 100 programs,

and moved it to a more efficient, market-based system of crop support.

"A number of reforms that I proposed are included in the bill," Neugebauer said. "I'll be the first to admit that it isn't perfect—I'd like to see even more savings from food stamps. But I believe this is our best chance to cut spending and support our farmers and ranchers. When Congress returns in November, I'll continue to push for a long-term Farm Bill to give our producers the certainty they need."

The last time Congress failed to pass a farm bill in a timely fashion was in the early 70s.

Although many consider the current situation a policy error, the real impact of not passing a farm bill doesn't occur until after the first of the year, when it would revert back to the 1949 farm bill.

The versions of the farm bill in the House of Representatives and Senate are extremely different.

About 80 percent of what is collectively, of not misleadingly, called the Farm Bill represents nutrition programs, primarily food stamps, now supporting almost 50 million Americans.

The Senate bill currently proposed could cut food stamp spending by \$4 billion over the next decade — largely by targeting abuses. The Republican-controlled House would like to see a far bigger cut, mainly by tightening eligibility for food stamps.

About \$100 billion of the total package would be devoted to crop subsidies and other farm

programs.

The Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee last month approved a bill that would save \$23 billion over the next decade by ending direct payments and consolidating other programs.

The bill would strengthen the subsidized crop insurance program and create a program to compensate farmers for smaller, or "shallow," revenue losses, based on a five-year average for areas actually planted.

Not having a multi-year farm bill in place puts undue burdens on rural communities, said USDA Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack in a Sept. 22 statement.

"In a year that has brought its share of challenges to America's farmers and ranchers, the House

Republicans have added new uncertainty for rural America," he said. "Unfortunately, House Republicans left Washington without passing comprehensive, multi-year food, farm and jobs legislation, leaving thousands of farming families exposed."

President Obama also blamed members of the House in his weekly address on Sept. 22. "Last week, without much fanfare, Members of the House of Representatives banged a gavel, turned out the lights, and rushed home, declaring their work finished for now," he said. "If that frustrates you, it should—because their work isn't finished." Obama pointed to a "whole bunch of proposals" left sitting on the table, including the farm bill.

Wade said whatever form the new bill takes, it will take some adjustment.

"There will need to be some bridging mechanisms so producers can go from what they're doing now to what they will have to do next," he said. "There are a lot of ways it still could go."

Crop producers will feel less of an immediate affect than other producers like livestock and dairies.

The every-five-year agriculture policy bill funds subsidies for dairy farmers, including the Milk Income Loss Program, which compensates farmers for a portion of their loss when prices fall below a certain amount.

Without legislation in tact, they would lose that protection.

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BELT FAMILY

Sentinel Briefs

Theater Booster

Club in Works

Supporters of the Seminole High School Theatre Dept. are attempting to organize a booster club to help assist the group with various activities and fund raisers through the course of the upcoming year.

If you're interested in becoming a booster member, you're encouraged to call Rachel Hatley (806) 773-9522, or Becky Rickman at (815) 434-6399.

Interested persons are also encouraged to attend the group's next meeting, scheduled for Sept. 27, at 7 p.m., at the old Seminole Junior High School Band Hall.

Some upcoming activities being planned by the boosters include:

- Beauty & the Beast coloring contest. Coloring pages will be delivered to the campuses. Kids will have until October 1st to get those turned back in. The Theater Productions class will be judging. There will be three age groups; Ages up to 5, 6-8, & 9-11. First prize in each group is two tickets to opening night of Beauty & the Beast, performed by the SHS Theater. Also, they will win a meet and greet with the cast before the play starts, and will have photo opportunities. There will be 2nd and 3rd prizes for each group, as well.
- Family Movie Nite, Saturday, October 6, @ 6pm, SISD Auditorium; Showing Beauty

& the Beast; \$2 per person Concessions will be on hand. Please, no unattended children. Winner of the coloring contest will be announced after the movie. Winners must be present to win.

Residence

Homestead Exempts

AUSTIN — Texas HB 252 sets forth new requirements for the application, including requiring the property owner to state on the application form that the owner is not claiming a residence homestead exemption on another residence homestead in or outside Texas.

What new documentation must be submitted with a residence homestead application? A copy of a driver's license or state-issued personal identification certificate AND a copy of a vehicle registration receipt.

1. What if the applicant does not own a vehicle?

The applicant should fill out the affidavit on the application form stating the applicant does not own a vehicle AND submit a copy of a utility bill in the applicant's name for the property.

2. Why do applicants have to submit this new documentation?

Tax Code Section 11.43 prohibits a chief appraiser from allowing a residence homestead exemption unless the address

on the driver's license or state-issued personal identification certificate corresponds to the address on the applicant's vehicle registration receipt or utility bill. This address must correspond to the address for which the exemption is being claimed.

3. Are these documents required for over age 65, disabled, and veterans' homestead exemption applications?

Yes.
4. What if a spouse or a co-owner of a residence homestead is not shown on the deed as owning the property?

If the applicant is not specifically identified on a deed or other appropriate instrument recorded in the applicable real property records as an owner of the residence homestead, then the applicant should fill out the affidavit on the application or provide other compelling evidence establishing the applicant's ownership of an interest in the homestead.

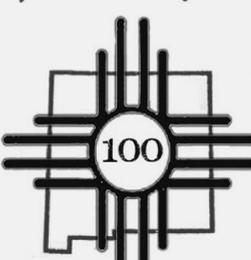
5. When must applicants begin submitting the additional documentation?

The additional documentation must accompany a residence homestead exemption application that is filed with a chief appraiser on or after September 1, 2012.

6. Will I be required to provide this information if I currently have a residence homestead exemption on my property?

Only if the chief appraiser requests that a new application be filed must the information be provided.

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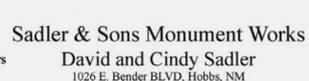
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