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# Why Farm Support Persists: An Explanation Grounded in Congressional Political Economy

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“Politics precedes policy”

Eva Clayton (D-NC, 1992- 2002)

“All politics is local”

Tip O’Neil (D-MA, 1952- 1987)

## **Abstract**

*In the paper we provide an explanation of the persistence of the commodity titles in US farm bills that is grounded in core theories of the policy process from the political science literature. The political science literature explains policy continuity and policy change from a number of different perspectives and we use these to explain why the commodity titles of farm bills have persisted in the face of considerable opposition and how in response the Agriculture Committees have introduced incremental change to the content of farm bills to facilitate each bill’s passage. Unlike the standard approach of agricultural economists which focuses on the broader national economic efficiency impacts of farm programs, we concentrate on, narrower local political forces that affect individual Members of the Congress, and on the legislative process that created each farm bill.*

## **1.0 Introduction**

The agricultural economics profession in the United States has had a longstanding opposition to traditional farm policy, as exemplified by the various farm bills (for example: Bonnen and Schweikhardt, 1998; Cochrane and Ryan, 1976; de Gorter and Swinnen, 2002; Gardner, 1987a; Hallberg, 1992; Hathaway, 1963; Orden, 2002; Paarlberg, 1964; Rausser, 1992; Sumner, 1995; Tweeten, 1989; Tweeten, 2002; Tweeten and Zulauf, 1997). The vast majority of the literature assessing US agricultural policy has condemned the economic inefficiencies caused by:

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government set floor (loan rates) and target (deficiency payments) prices, the distorting effects of land idling requirements, and limits on the number of acres that can be planted in a particular crop. Less common, but still significant, have been equity arguments against the farm bill - only some commodities are eligible for support, most payments go to large farms that are not needy, and that farm families as a general class now have higher incomes and more wealth than the average American household.

Yet, despite decades of efforts by the agricultural economics profession and others concerned with improving public policy, the commodity titles of farm bills have maintained a high degree of stability. This is not say that there have not been efforts by various Secretaries of Agriculture under both Democrat and Republican administrations to reform farm programs, either by increasing the degree of government control - the Brannon proposal of 1949, and the Freeman proposal of 1963, or to reduce government involvement - Benson in 1954, Butz in 1973, Block in 1985, Yeutter in 1995. Yet each of these administration efforts came to nothing, as they were roundly rejected by the Congress, even by members of the President's own party.

While the agricultural economics literature recognizes that politics drives farm policy the analysis does not usually go deeper than depicting farm interests as effectively lobbying against the broader public interest. For example, Tweeten and Zulauf (2008) structure the situation as a principal-agent problem where the agent, Congress, is supposed to serve the public interest, but instead elected legislators see only their specific electorate as the principal. This public choice approach is well grounded in economic theory, but it does not offer a lot of detail on how farm policy has actually been managed within the Congress. Our objective is to adopt some core theories of policy continuity and change from the political science literature to fill this gap. These theories offer a way to better understand the political realities of policy development and suggest why agricultural economists have consistently been premature in predicting the end of traditional price supports.

On the other hand, given the inherently political nature of farm bills it is surprising that the political science profession has, for the most part, not strongly engaged in the analysis of agricultural policy. As Grant and Keeler note in the introduction to their two-volume compendium on *Agricultural Policy* - "... the quantity of articles appearing in political science journals has been more limited." (p. ix). However, they do go on to observe that examination of agricultural policy has been useful in advancing core political science theories, notably Olson's *Logic of Collective Action* and the idea of a "closed policy community" (p. ix-x). In the paper we adopt the converse approach, and use key ideas from political science to better understand the development of U.S. agricultural policy.

Our thesis is that agricultural economists have largely failed to recognize crucial political factors in determining the persistence of farm policy. First, they have focused on aggregate efficiency gains for the national and international economy, and largely ignored the local benefits that farm bills bring to specific commodity

producers in particular geographic areas. In particular, since the 1980s the adverse trade impacts of farm bills have received the most attention by the profession. Second, they have focused on the Administration as a source of change through reform efforts championed by the Secretary of Agriculture, despite acknowledging the reality that farm bills for the last decades have been constructed by the Congress<sup>2</sup>. In this regard, the two substantial breaks with stability, the 1996 and 2014 farm bills, were driven by Congress with minimal administration support. Third, they view the persistence of farm programs over time as an aberration in public policy, when in reality most public policies exhibit inertia and are rarely radically altered (Kay, 2006; Wilson 2012)<sup>3</sup>. Finally, they seem to suppose that the persistence of the commodity titles over time reflects a stable and uniform coalition that has been captured by special interests to form an “iron triangle” where farm groups, USDA and the Congressional Agriculture committees develop autonomous farm legislation with little regard for the broader public interest.

In contrast, we suggest a somewhat different interpretation - that farm bills are clearly domestic policy legislation that are constructed by a subset of elected members (the Agriculture Committees) who have a strong personal interest in constituent service driven by the desire to be re-elected (Browne and Paik, 1993; Smith and Deering, 1990). Crucially, although the number of members of the House and Senate who represent a strong farm oriented constituency has fallen over time, there are still enough of them to populate the two Agriculture Committees, and these committees continue to have primary jurisdiction over farm legislation.

Following Olsen (1965) we recognize that groups of farmers have a special interest in particular commodity titles and will act politically to support those interests, even at the expense of broader national economic efficiency and equity objectives. We note that this type of behavior is not restricted to farmers, and it accounts both for the relative stability of many public policies, and underpins the ability of the Agriculture Committees to use “log-rolling” strategies to get their legislation approved by the vast majority of Members of Congress who have limited interest in agriculture.

While periodic reauthorization of farm bills is pointed to as an example of bi-partisan, bi-cameral cooperation, suggesting a strong and stable coalition; in reality the continued existence of the commodity titles is purchased in each farm bill cycle by a considerable effort to assemble a coalition that ultimately supports the bill (Browne, 1989; Morgan, 2010). Membership in these coalitions varies over time, and specific coalitions reflect: provisions in the actual legislation that benefit the interests of specific members, constraints imposed on the Agriculture Committees

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<sup>2</sup> It must be noted that many of the agricultural economists who advocate policy reform have worked for the Administration, either as senior advisors to Secretaries of Agriculture, or as members of the President’s Council of Economic Advisors. Few have any experience within the Congress. This may account in part for their fixation on the Administration as a reform agent.

<sup>3</sup> A Google Scholar search of the two terms “policy continuity” and “theory” produces over 3000 academic citations that address some aspect of policy continuity or policy change for a wide variety of policies and across a large number of countries.

by the current rules and policies of the House and Senate, and the ability of Committee members to trade votes for farm bills by others in return for future or past support by members of the Agriculture Committees for other legislation (Bonnen, Browne and Schweikhardt, 1996). In the context of this last point, Hurwitz *et al.* show that in the 104th Congress members of the House Agriculture Committee only broke with their party on votes that were purely distributive, but firmly followed party lines on partisan votes (2001, p.920). One obvious result of this changing policy context is that while the commodity titles of farm bills have typically experienced only incremental change, the rest of the farm bill has grown significantly with new programs and authorities being added in each cycle. Most obviously, over a few decades the Nutrition Title has gone from a minor element to by far the largest expenditure item within recent farm bills.

Finally, the persistence of agricultural price supports is not unique to the United States (Paarlberg, 1989). Most other member countries of the OECD have also been unable to reform their internal agricultural policies to reduce support despite agreeing to do so (OECD, 2010), and successive rounds of international trade agreements continue to be blocked by disagreements over agricultural support by both developed and developing countries. In particular, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the European Union has been criticized, perhaps even more than US farm bills, for its undesirable economic efficiency and equity effects (for example: Mahe and Roe, 1996; Borrell and Hubbard, 2000; Philippidis and Hubbard, 2001; Swinbank and Daugbjerg, 2006). While the mechanisms supporting farmers in the CAP have changed significantly in recent decades the program continues to provide a high level of support (OECD, 2014). Similarly, Thies and Porche (2007) suggest that the failure by economists to consider the political system is central to their inability to explain the persistence of agricultural protection in the developed nations. Their analysis also shows that agricultural protection is not unique but fits into a larger pattern of industrial protection that is common across many countries (p. 125).

The interesting question from this perspective of an ever-changing context in which farm legislation is constructed is, how have the two Agriculture Committees been able to maintain the stability of the commodity titles over an extended period of time, when: the significance of agriculture in the economy and society has changed, the number of Members of both Houses with a significant interest in farm programs has declined, agriculture has gone through multiple cycles of prosperity and decline, the rules of Congress have changed significantly, and most Administrations have supported policy change?

The rest of the paper is organized in the following way. In the next section we review the actual votes for various farm bills and show that the conventional assumption that farm bills have strong bipartisan support is greatly overstated. In reality farm bills, like most other legislation, have significant opposition. This leads to the next section, which reviews a number of factors, or forces, that have allowed Congressional supporters of the commodity titles to construct the support needed

to pass each farm bill. The section following identifies the evolution of forces that have tended to mitigate the ability of farm bills supporters to achieve the continuation of commodity programs. It is the tension between these two sets of forces that we address in the next section, which reviews political theories of the policy process. Elements from various theories are used to track changes in the structure of farm bills and change in the political context of the Congress. The final section draws some summary conclusions.

## **2.0 Continuity of Support**

The conventional wisdom of political analysts is that for over half a century, irrespective of which party controls each house of Congress, there has been broad based support for farm bills. This broad support for the final compromise bill after the House and Senate reconcile their differences through a Conference Committee has indeed been broadly supported, but so too are most pieces of legislation that reach this stage. However, Table 1<sup>4</sup> suggests this support is not as broad or universal as is commonly thought. A second form of compromise that is often appealed to is the longstanding ability of Democrats and Republicans on the two agriculture committees to work together. This is perhaps a more telling sign of compromise, but it too should be interpreted with caution.

The consensus in the political science literature that studies Congressional Committees is that the two agriculture committees fall into a category of committees whose members are focused on constituent services (Eulau and Karps 1977; Smith and Deering, 1990; Hurwitz *et al.* 2001). Certain behaviors produce electoral benefits (Mayhew 1974). This is especially applicable to committee assignments. Members choose to serve on these committees because they are perceived as being important to a significant portion of their electorate. For example, one of the two Senators from North Dakota is always on the Senate Agriculture Committee, and at least one Congressman from rural Kansas has historically been on the House Agriculture Committee<sup>5</sup> and when the tobacco program existed there was always at least one Senator and one Member of the House from Kentucky and North Carolina serving on the Agriculture Committees. Members on this category of committee may not choose it because of their personal interest, but out of electoral necessity. However, once on the Committee they have to be able to point to their accomplishments, which typically entails compromise, but always involves defending constituent interests.

### *2.1 Farm Bill Votes*

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<sup>4</sup> The column labeled Narrow Majority shows when one party controls one of the Houses of Congress by only a small majority, making either full support from its caucus or support from the other party essential to pass legislation. The column labeled Not Bipartisan identifies farm bills where one party in a Chamber did not strongly support the legislation.

<sup>5</sup> In December 2012 a more than 150 year period of a member from the Kansas delegation being on the House Agriculture Committee ended when Representative Tim Huelskamp was removed from the Committee by House Republican leaders ostensibly for failing to support Committee and leadership positions.

When compared to other legislation, farm bills have a reputation for being consensus driven, but how appropriate is that reputation? Since 1965 when the modern omnibus farm bill approach began there have been eleven farm bills. Of these one was vetoed and overridden (2008)<sup>6</sup>, but in only two instances (2008 and 1990) did the conference, or final, version of the farm bill receive a majority of votes by the members of both parties in both Houses (Table 2). In all other cases at least one party failed to have the majority of its members vote for the compromise bill in at least one House. No pattern for this disagreement is apparent. It occurred when the objecting caucus is a clear minority, so its support is not crucial (2014, 1973, 1965). It occurred when the majority had a narrow margin, which might suggest a desire to craft a bill that is broadly acceptable to both parties (2002, 1996). And, a majority in one of the four caucuses failed to support the farm bill at least twice in this period, with Senate Democrats slightly more likely to vote against farm bills than the other three caucuses. When one party controlled both Houses of Congress their caucuses almost always support the conference bill, except in 1970 when more Democrats in the Senate voted against the bill than for it.

While individual caucuses can fail to support a specific farm bill, in almost all cases farm bills pass with a considerable majority of yea over nay votes (Table 1). This phenomenon has been true: for divided Congresses, for Congresses where the majority has been narrow, so minority support is more consequential, and for Congresses when the majority party has greatly exceeded the size of the minority. Even so, some exceptions exist where only a slim majority of the Members voted in favor of the bill. In 1985 in the Senate there were only 55 positive votes and 38 negative votes with a number of Senators not voting, and similarly in the Senate in 1970 only 38 positive votes were cast, but with only 35 votes in opposition. In the House in 1981 the bill passed on a 205 to 202 vote. In all other cases supporting votes have solidly exceeded negative votes.

Given these caveats it is true that there is a long record of both bi-cameral and inter-party support for Farm Bills, and for farm legislation in general, over almost eighty years. In part this reflects the fact that farm policy is domestically oriented and that virtually all Members of Congress have some farmers in their electorate, and that farmers continue to be held in great esteem by the population (Freshwater, 1994; Hanson, 2000). Because agricultural policy is domestically oriented, it becomes a part of local politics, and consequently is something that most members have to consider in terms of its implications for his or her re-election. In general, one might say there is no obvious political benefit for most Congressmen and Senators to be seen as anti-farmer. As a result, a member can be opposed to specific farm policies, but the opposition has to be carefully nuanced.

On the other hand, the agricultural economics profession in the United States, which has carried out the most analysis of the impacts of farm bills, is largely opposed to

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<sup>6</sup> In 1995 the House version of the farm bill was attached to an omnibus budget resolution that was vetoed by the President. This led to a reworking of farm legislation in 1996 that ultimately became the FAIR Act.

traditional farm policies that support commodities (Gardner, 1987b; Paarlberg, 1964; Rausser, 1992; Tweeten, 2002). Similarly, other professions - public administration (Friedman, 1999), political science (Gawande and Hoekman, 2006; Paarlberg 1989a; Park and Jensen, 2008), also have strong reservations about commodity support, as do many environmental groups and international NGOs focused on food and development issues.

Even though opposition to the commodity titles of farm bills has clearly been increasing over time, this external opposition has had only limited political impact on individual Members of Congress, particularly those Members with relatively large rural constituencies who are the most likely to be on the agriculture committees that actually shape the legislation that is offered for a vote in each Chamber. Although there is consistent background support for farmers by the American public, this, by itself is not enough to explain the long run of strong Congressional support for legislation that is largely seen to deliver large amounts of public money to individuals who are not needy. Countering this external opposition to commodity programs are five important factors that have helped to construct a broad coalition that maintained support for farm bills, and implicitly for traditional commodity programs.

### **3.0 Constructing Congressional Support for Commodity Programs**

A first factor has been the willingness of the Agriculture Committees to broaden the scope of farm bills over time to incorporate far more than commodity support programs. This includes: support for famine relief and other disasters in developing countries, provision of various domestic nutrition programs, support for broader rural development efforts that primarily benefit non-farm rural households and firms, and support for environmental preservation and remediation programs, as major elements of farm bills. Further, as the interests of farmers narrowed due to greater specialization, the commodity programs themselves were tweaked to provide commodity specific support that was more closely tied to different regions of the country. In particular, domestic nutrition programs have been particularly important in gaining floor support by House and Senate members who have large urban poor populations that benefit, perhaps disproportionately, from SNAP and other nutrition programs, but which have limited interest in commodity programs. Similarly, suburban member of the House can point to votes for farm bills that: protect the environment, support renewable energy production and improve wildlife habitat as benefiting the interests of their constituents.

The result is a farm bill that offers something of value to wide variety of interests, and a bill that is structured to minimize competition among these disparate interests through efforts to minimize direct conflicts (Browne, 1988b; Aldrich and Rohde 2009; Carson, et al 2010). For example, during the period when farmers had to reduce planted acres in commodities that received price support, such as corn, wheat or cotton, they were prohibited from planting these acres in fruits, vegetables and other specialty crops that did not receive price supports, in order to avoid



potential challenges to the legislation from Members representing districts where these crops were important.

A second factor that has played a role in the persistence of commodity policy is the ability of agricultural organizations to maintain a coalition despite the increasing diversity of their individual interests. When commodity programs were first put in place they effectively provided support to the vast majority of farms, even though only a handful of crops were actually supported. Because farms at the time were relatively homogeneous in terms of: farm size, reliance on farm income and in terms of producing a broad mix of crop and livestock outputs, most farms received significant benefits from the original commodity programs. Over time farms have become far more specialized, producing only two or three outputs (Dimitri, Effland and Conklin, 2005); and heterogeneous in terms of size, with a small number of large commercial farms (5% of farms) producing 75% of farm sales. The vast majority of farm households now relies mostly on off-farm income and receive only limited benefits from farm programs. Specialization has also led to large regional differences in crop production with specific parts of the country producing the majority of certain crops.

These changes led to pressure on Committee members to tailor support for particular commodities to suit the needs of farmers producing each commodity (Bowers, Rasmussen and Baker, 1984; Hallberg, 1992). As farm structure evolved support for additional commodities was introduced through time to improve farmer, and individual Member, support for farm legislation. Rural development funding was introduced give operators of small farms, who received limited support from the commodity title, a reason to support the farm bill. These strategies allowed both general-purpose organizations, like the Farm Bureau, the National Farmers Union and the Grange; and commodity specific organizations, like the National Association of Wheat Growers, the Pork Producers Association, the National Soybean council etc., to maintain a strong coalition of interest in the farm bill. Following Olsen, as farm numbers steadily declined the importance of a strong coalition of the remaining farmers became an essential factor in allowing a concentrated minority of beneficiaries to maintain access to a program that was funded by taxes on a diffuse majority.

A third factor important in maintaining support for farm legislation is the vote trading or "log-rolling" process in Congress (Buchanan and Tullock 1962; Kau and Rubin 1979; Browne 1988a; Browne 1988b). While the Agriculture Committees worked hard to expand the scope of farm bills to attract broader Congressional support, at the end of the day the provisions of the bills remained only of limited interest to those with few or no rural voters. However rural legislators could offer to support parallel legislation that was of great interest to urban oriented legislators in return for their farm bill support (Evans and Robinson, p. 4). In an increasingly urban dominated Congress the share of urban oriented legislation far exceeded legislation of direct interest to rural legislators.

A fourth factor that was crucial for most of the time period of farm bills was the presence of a strong group of legislators in the House who acted to bridge party differences between Democrats and Republicans bringing about the commonly noted consensus. Historically, the Republican Party has been opposed to all New Deal legislation and suspicious of the types of subsidy and direct intervention in business decisions that are found in farm legislation (Paarlberg and Orden, 1996). Conversely, Democrats have been concerned about the consequences of a "free market" in farming on: food prices, farm incomes, particularly those of small farms, the potential for instability in production, the impact of farming on the natural environment and other factors that led them to favor greater intervention.

From the 1930s through the 1980s when Democrats dominated Congress and led most farm bill legislation there was a significant minority of moderates from farm districts in the Republican Party who were reliable supporters of interventionist farm bills. These members not only voted for Farm Bills, which provided much of the much vaunted non-partisan support, but also acted within the Republican caucus to limit opposition from the majority of Republicans who were less supportive of farm bills. However, by the late 1970s, as Democrats began to lose their almost absolute control of the South, and more conservative members became dominant in the Republican Party the role of the Republican moderates as a bridge across parties was reduced.

Conversely, the increasing conservatism of rural voters led to the rise of a group of "Blue Dog" Democrats who were reliably conservative on most economic and social issues, but who were strong supporters of farm legislation. The Blue Dog Democrats worked with Republicans on many issues, but in turn expected Republican support for farm bills. From the 1980s through the first decade of this century the Blue Dog caucus exerted a moderating influence on their urban Democrat colleagues and maintained bi-partisan support for farm bills.

The final explanation for the persistence of commodity programs is an artifact of the way Congress organizes itself. Administration priorities for policy evolved over time in ways that reflected national and international change in markets and production technologies, but the political imperatives for the elected members of Congress remained relatively constant. From the 1950s forward, presidential proposals for agricultural policy reform, whether for, greater market liberalization by Benson under Eisenhower, Butz under Nixon or Block under Reagan; or for a stronger role for government as proposed by, Brannon under Truman, or Freeman under Kennedy, were met by strong Congressional resistance (Cochrane and Ryan, 1976; Bonnen, Browne and Schweikhardt, 1998). Although the number of farmers declined rapidly through the 1950, 1960s and 1970s, farm organizations did not experience a parallel decrease in political power and farmers mostly remained comfortable with the basic structure of US commodity policy.

Farm legislation in the 1930s was driven by Administration proposals that the Congress largely took and converted to statutes, but that situation changed by the 1950s as all Congressional committees began to exert independence from

Presidential priorities. As noted before, in the late 1940s the Administration first started to argue for limits on commodity price supports, as national priorities for agriculture moved away from supporting farmers' incomes to expanding trade in agricultural commodities and improving domestic nutrition and access to food. In addition, as the food processing industry became larger and more consolidated it too started to increase pressure in Washington for less reliance on acreage restrictions that were used as a way to reduce government payments for price supports.

Over time, the number of members wanting to serve on either Agriculture Committee declined as the United States became more urban, but members from the remaining farm oriented districts and states continued to work for constituent interests and blocked proposed Administration changes that their constituents largely disliked. Farm bills once they left the Agriculture Committee were seldom challenged on the floor of either body, due to a combination of: limited understanding by others of the complex content of the legislation, a tradition of not opposing other committees' proposed legislation for fear that your committee would face similar scrutiny, complex vote trading strategies among members, and a recognition that support for farmers was popular among virtually all parts of the country (Browne, 1988b; Browne and Paik, 1993; Evans and Robinson, 2010). In addition both Republicans and Democrats saw advantages in reminding a President, even one from their party, that the Congress could choose to act against the wishes of the Administration.

Each of these forces contributed to the stability of the commodity titles over time, but the role of each varied over time and the task of the Agriculture Committees was to adapt to the changes. But, in addition to factors that enabled stability there were other forces that worked against efforts to maintain price supports, and these forces have gradually become more important over time. The result has been a steady reduction in the ability of the Agriculture Committees to control the content of farm bills.

#### **4.0 Destabilizing Forces**

In this section a set of forces are identified that act to limit the ability of the Agriculture Committees to control farm bill legislation in a way that best serves their constituents. While these forces have not taken away the lead role of the members of the Agriculture Committees in crafting farm legislation they act as constraints on the options available to the Committees. And, in some cases they lead to significant adjustments in strategies as old approaches either become less effective or new approaches have to be taken, as in 1996 and 2014, in order to continue to demonstrate a commitment to supporting agriculture.

The first major weakening occurred with the 1985 farm bill when environmental interests that had been rebuffed in earlier efforts to influence the use of marginal land achieved a major victory with the introduction of a new Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The strategy of broadening support for farm bills by adding more

titles and programs to the legislation as a way to offset the declining number of legislators with major farm constituencies had now resulted in a sufficiently large number of interests that it became increasingly difficult to help one group without harming another (Browne, 1989).

Unlike the usual set-asides that involved only a short term reduction in planted acreage the CRP required farmers to commit to long-term land retirement contracts. The ongoing farm financial crisis at that time created a confluence of interests between farmers, who wanted to remove land from production to help stabilize farmland values, and environmentalists, who wanted to protect marginal land. Farmers saw long-term contracts as both providing a stable cash flow and potentially increasing the value of land that remained in production. The environmental movement welcomed the opportunity to take erodible and other marginal cropland out of production for an extended period.

One way to interpret this bargain is as a continuation of the Agriculture Committees successfully broadening the appeal of farm bills by adding new titles and programs to attract a broader base of support, but historically, this type of coalition broadening effort had not had major consequences for production. In this case the CRP was intentionally designed to lock up land for an extended period of time, making it unavailable when prices rebounded. This marked a major expansion of non-farm interests into the shaping of the farm production environment, and suggests a weakening of political power. The coalition between farmers and land conservationists was effective as long as prices were low and stocks were high. When prices rebounded farmers wanted to escape from their CRP contracts but were unable to do so, in part because of opposition by environmental organizations.

A similar conflict emerged when funding for rural development, which was put in place to attract support from small farm and non-farm rural interests was reduced when demands for higher commodity support placed pressure on the USDA budget. And, most obviously, over time the steady expansion of the nutrition programs provided urban support, but its increasing cost began to alarm fiscal conservatives and cause pressure on the entire USDA budget. Even within farm groups tensions grew between export-oriented commodities favoring greater liberalization, and commodity producers who focused on domestic markets and wanted to limit production to push up prices.

Second, in the 1980s the Administration shifted its strategy for reducing farm price supports from making direct proposals to the Congress for reform, to coupling agricultural reform to trade negotiations (de Gorter and Swinnen, 2002). By making agriculture an integral part of trade deals, after blocking the inclusion of agriculture for decades, the Administration hoped to fracture Congressional support for the status quo. If a trade deal could be negotiated that was beneficial to other important sectors in the US economy but bargained away the ability to support farmers through price supports the Administration expectation was that the Congress would accept the deal. This two-level game continues to be a strategy for subsequent administrations, but to date it has only been partially successful because other

countries have refused to dismantle their supports and the US has been unwilling to do so unilaterally (Paarlberg, 1997). The strategy has however resulted in pressures to make significant reforms in agricultural support as some agreement has been reached through multi-lateral negotiations.

A third factor in the erosion of committee control was administrative reform in the Congress itself. In 1970 Congress passed legislation reducing the autonomy of committees and weakening the power of Chairmen and reducing the role of seniority (Smith and Deering, pp. 46-47). In parallel the Democrat and Republican caucuses in both houses adopted internal procedures that limit the tenure of committees chairs and established greater opportunities for individual members to influence committee agendas. These rule changes had a limited direct impact on the Agriculture Committees because their members had relatively similar beliefs about the direction of agricultural policy. However the indirect effect on the two Agriculture Committees was significant because it became more difficult for various Committee Chairmen to bargain amongst themselves for favors and support.

The growing focus on the budget also plays an important role. The 1974 Budget Act set in motion a process that significantly reduced Committee autonomy. As budget pressures increased in the 1980s and agricultural outlays grew, due to weak exports and the farm financial crisis, there was more discussion of program costs. By the 1980s Agriculture Committees had to construct farm bills within a budget envelope set by the Budget Committees. Budget considerations now play a central role in shaping policy choices because different forms of support have very different budget implications. In particular, direct outlays that are not capped, such as for commodity price supports or food stamps, are more difficult to fit within the budget framework.

Changes in the Appropriations Committees and processes have also led to a weakening over time of the ability to protect traditional commodity programs. Appropriations committees set the actual amounts of funds available for non-entitlement programs. Historically, this has given them a huge amount of power because they can choose to fund or not fund specific elements of any piece of legislation. For example, in the House Jamie Whitten served as the Chairman of the Agricultural Appropriations Subcommittee from 1949 to 1992, except for the period 1952 to 1954 when Republicans controlled the House. He was Chairman of the full Appropriations Committee from 1979 to 1992 and was widely known as the "Permanent Secretary of Agriculture" because of his ability to influence both the USDA and any farm related legislation. Mr. Whitten strongly supported commodity programs during his tenure on the Appropriations Committee and other Members of the House were very aware of this support. While Mr. Whitten is perhaps the most obvious example of a powerful Member who is also defender of farm interests, there are others including, Speaker Tom Foley in the 1980s, Senator Tom Daschle in the 1990s, and Senator Mitch McConnell today.

Since "Congressional earmarks" were eliminated in 2011 the power of the appropriations committees has been reduced, in part because of stronger budget

controls on outlays, in part because of the growing difficulty in passing appropriations bills in a fractured Congress and in part because of the greater control exerted by party leaders on Committees.

In the last decades the degree of polarization between the two parties has increased. The first casualties of this shift were moderate Republicans who had provided support for farm bills but were largely eliminated by mid-2000s. More recently the Blue Dog Democrats have experienced a similar decline in numbers to the point that in 2014 elections they were all but eliminated. The much noted bi-partisan support for farm bills reflected the ability of these centrist politicians, most from rural areas, to forge compromises and support agricultural legislation. The currently high degree of polarization is exemplified by the decision in the House to decouple the Nutrition title from the rest of the Farm Bill. Highly conservative supporters of farm legislation saw nutrition programs as a poor candidate for national policy. In doing so they shattered a multi-decade strategy of building a coalition for farm bills.

Finally, farmers themselves have tended to disengage from the farm bill process in recent years. The last decade has seen fairly high levels of farm prices and the role of commodity legislation has been limited. In addition the shift to crop insurance, which is authorized by permanent legislation, has further reduced the focus of crop farmers on traditional commodity legislation. Farmers are no longer as focused on price risk, which was the traditional concern of the commodity title. Futures markets, contracting, vertical integration and crop insurance have all played a significant role in allowing farmers to better manage price risk which has lessened their interest in participating fully in the farm bill process.

## **5.0 Political Science Models of Policy Dynamics**

In this section we suggest how theories of the policy process developed in the political science literature can be used to understand both change and stability in commodity titles of farm bills. There are many theories of the policy process and each focuses on specific mechanism that can provide an explanation for why policies change. Notably political scientists recognize that there is no dominant explanation because policy change evolves over time and varies with circumstances so in certain conditions some theories are more useful than others. This contrasts with the approach economists have taken, which relies on a single explanation based on the public choice approach.

Given the stability of agricultural commodity policy, it is important to understand the political forces that have maintained these programs in the face of significant opposition. We start with the 1981 paper by, Weingast, Shepsle and Johnsen that uses a neoclassical optimization model to show, in the presence of geographically fixed benefits from government programs and district based legislators, that public policy decisions will be Pareto inferior to a policy set that maximizes aggregate national benefits. Because some policies benefit voters in specific districts, but their costs are spread across all taxpayers, elected legislators improve their odds of re-election by voting for policies that are redistributive in nature. While the focus of

Weingast, Shepsle and Johnsen is on traditional "pork-barrel" projects that are specific to one district, their analysis easily extends to commodity programs that have benefits that accrue to a small number of Congressional districts.

Notably, Weingast, Shepsle and Johnsen are able to formally demonstrate that it is the interest of legislators to engage in "log-rolling" to ensure that all districts get a project (p. 651). In the case of agriculturally dominated districts many typical public projects - public transit, funding for the arts, defense contracts, major research centers etc. are not options. This makes farm programs an attractive policy request for these local legislators, and one that is likely to be supported by others in a *quid pro quo* process of mutual support. The authors also demonstrate that from a district perspective many of the costs of a program are seen as benefits, since they result in an inward transfer of revenue in excess of the local tax burden. They also show that as a district's share of the tax burden associated with a policy/project declines the degree of economic inefficiency increases (p. 654). For example, if the legislator from the district is especially powerful (seniority or a Committee Chair) then there is an increased likelihood of that individual being able to achieve either greater benefits for the district or a reduced share of costs.

More recently, Banks and Duggan (2008) provide a well-structured theoretical model of incentives for elected officials to commit to a stable policy regime as a way to improve their odds of reelection. The essence of their argument is that voters have multi-dimensional policy preferences, but are unable to assess *a priori* the policy preferences of candidates. In this environment an incumbent who has supported a specific policy over time can be thought of as signaling his or her personal preferences. Then, if the supported policies are approved by a majority of voters, the incumbent will be reelected, because the preferences of the opponent are obscure and voters highly discount campaign promises.

The Banks and Duggan model incorporates several attractive features. It accounts for differences in preferences across multiple policy fields by individuals, both electors and candidates. It recognizes that there are benefits to elected office that an incumbent would like to maintain. It sees the political process as a repeated game where past behavior influences current outcomes. And, it recognizes that voters see campaign promises as cheap talk. Most importantly, the model can explain the persistence of farm policy in the United States by suggesting that in farm dependent jurisdictions there has been consistent political support for these programs. Consequently, incumbents who support farm programs are consistently reelected.

Given the argument of Banks and Duggan, what political forces might lead to policy reform? Mintrom and Norman address the question of policy entrepreneurs and policy change (2009)<sup>7</sup>. In their paper they identify "... five mainstream theorizations of policy change" (p. 654). While their paper focuses on ways to connect models of

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<sup>7</sup> We recognize that the typology of policy change used by Mintrom and Norman is only one many possibilities. Petridou (2014) provides a more recent classification of theories that has clear similarities to, but also differs from, that of Mintrom and Norman.

policy entrepreneurship to these five larger theories, our intent is to examine these theories to see if conditions in agriculture meet their explanation for policy change. In particular, we look at these theories for ways to account for the absence of policy change. While the opposite of change is continuity, the same types of political forces are needed to achieve either objective. In addition, we consider the argument made by Mintrom and Norman for policy entrepreneurs as change agents. The five models they consider in addition to policy entrepreneurs are:

1. Lindblom's (1968) focus on the role of incrementalism and proximate policy makers,
2. Kingdon's (1985) policy streams theory,
3. The importance of institutions, as suggested by March and Olsen 1989, and Hall and Taylor, 1996,
4. Baumgartner and Jones (1993) idea of punctuated equilibrium, and
5. Sabatier's (1988) model of advocacy coalitions.

Lindblom sees policy change as emanating from a set of powerful elected decision-makers, including legislative leaders, as well as the president and state governors. While individual leaders each have their own agenda, none is able to independently achieve it. Consequently, they have to form bargains with others who also have power to alter policy. Forming coalitions in turn requires compromises among the set of complex and conflicting agendas, which leads to only incremental change, because this is all that can be agreed upon.

A clear corollary of a process of incremental change is the possibility of a blocking coalition that can slow the process of change when there is no strong counter force. In, the case of farm bill legislation, Lindblom's theory is consistent with efforts, first by Chairmen of Agriculture Committees to form bargains with other Committee leaders to achieve their objectives, and then by all the members of the Agriculture Committees to bargain for supporting votes for farm bills by Members with only limited direct interest in farm legislation. Lindblom's model also extends to the possibility of narrow interest groups capturing a specific policy, an argument that has been made by critics of farm policy.

Kingdon sees policy change occurring when three conditions are jointly met. They are a problem stream, a policy stream and the political stream. The problem stream is a measure of whether the perceived problem is significant enough to require change. The policy stream examines whether there is at least one potential solution that is broadly supported. The politics stream considers whether politicians are prepared to support change. Kingdon's theory is effectively one of windows of opportunity. Unless all three streams converge policy will not change. The stream analogy suggests that at any point in time there are different problems different solutions and different political situations, and that over time all of these evolve somewhat independently.

From the perspective of Kingdon's theory the persistence of commodity policy reflects the lack of a window for change. Through time, for any particular farm bill,



there was no convergence of the three streams. Current policy may not have been perceived as a problem, Or the possible alternatives to current policy may not have been seen as appealing, Or, there was no political consensus that change was desirable. Absent this window of opportunity, Kingdon would predict a stable policy situation. While various administrations and others have perceived current policy to be a problem and have proposed a variety of policy alternatives, most of these proposals have failed to attract political support in the Congress.

In political science the importance of institutions as an explanation of policy change focuses on the nature of the structures or frameworks in which individuals operate (March and Olsen, 1989). These include, formal organizations, such as the Houses of Congress and the rules under which they operate, but also informal relationships, or norms, that govern the behavior of Members as policy makers. March and Olsen argue that the broad set of institutions create behavioral norms that not only determine what policy is considered but also shapes how policy is considered. Institutions themselves become political actors by shaping and regulating policy debates. Depending on their nature political institutions can favor policy change or impede it.

In the case of farm bills both the formal organization of Congress and traditions of behavior acted for most of the last seventy years to allow the Agriculture Committees almost complete freedom in shaping farm legislation. Both the formal rules of Congress that grant jurisdiction to specific Committees and the tradition of a Member not challenging another Committee's work preserved the authority of the Committees. For part of this period it appears there was an "iron triangle" composed of the Agriculture Committees, USDA and the Farm Bureau (Browne, 1988, pp. 136-139). But more recently Browne and others see this closed system as having broken down due to institutional change (Bonnen, Browne and Schweikardt, 1996; Browne, 1988)).

Baumgartner and Jones suggest a fourth way to approach policy change that focuses on the idea of punctuated equilibrium (1993). In this theory there are long periods of policy stability punctuated by sporadic points when a large policy change occurs. These long periods of stability are maintained by dominating policy images, or how political actors and the public understand and discuss a policy. When there is a shift in policy image, for instance a change in government preferences or societal shift, policies that were once stable are changed. In essence some external shock triggers a policy adjustment to realign policy with the new situation.

On the surface the idea of punctuated equilibrium seems to correspond with the path of farm legislation. Commodity policy has been stable over time. When commodity policy did change radically; in 1933 when it was introduced, in 1996 and in 2014, there were clear major shifts both in society and in the political system. In 1933 the Great Depression and the "first hundred days " of the Roosevelt Administration created the impetus for a new farm policy that was rapidly put in place. In 1996 the Republican sweep of the Congress and the "Contract With America" provided a similar context for the radical changes of the Federal

Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act (FAIR). Similarly, the large increase in nutrition outlays caused by the Great Depression of 2008-2010 and its lingering effects, combined with the rise of the "Tea Party" wing of the Republican party that opposed food assistance outlays on a variety of grounds, created the opportunity for another radical shift in farm support.

Yet countering the idea of punctuated equilibrium, which is usually interpreted as a shift to a new path of stability, is the fact that many of the reforms of the 1996 FAIR Act were significantly weakened in the 2002 farm bill as most of the old set of commodity programs were reintroduced even as direct payments were continued. In addition, in 1964 the Great Society programs championed by President Johnson were endorsed by Congress, which suggests another timely moment for a revision of agricultural policy, but the 1965 farm bill, while it did adopt a new omnibus structure, largely left traditional commodity programs intact. Similarly, during the period of the Reagan Revolution in the early 1980s when the President was able to obtain Congressional approval for much of his policy agenda, he failed in 1985 to obtain Congressional support for his proposals to reform farm policy.

Sabatier has suggested the importance of advocacy coalitions as a driver of policy change (1988). Rather than the sudden changes described in punctuated equilibrium theory, the advocacy coalition framework seeks to understand policy change as a slower, longer process that happens over a course of years, rather than in bursts. A policy subsystem is made up by a number of interests, including politicians, experts, interest groups, and bureaucrats. Each of the interested parties within a coalition have some deeper, core beliefs about government and society, which lead to advancing mutual policy preferences (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993; Jenkins-Smith, et al, 2014). By acting together the groups construct enough political pressure to overcome the inherent inertia of the policy process. The success of the approach hinges on a number of factors. The first is the ability of the various interests to identify potential members of a coalition and find a way to create a shared objective out of the diverse interests of the potential members. This shared objective then has to be converted into a specific policy outcome that can be promoted by the coalition members. Whether the coalition is successful or not in turn depends upon the power of counter-forces, including those favoring the status quo, but also other advocacy coalitions favoring competing policies.

While Sabatier sees advocacy coalitions as forces for change they can also be forces for stability. Indeed the history of farm bill legislation through the present is an example of an ever-shrinking number of farm oriented legislators finding ways to form coalitions that allow them to maintain commodity legislation that faces increasing opposition from Presidents and others. The increasing scope of farm bills over time shows the ability of farm interests to find ways to gain votes from Members who have other policy objectives than commodity price support. The membership of this coalition has had some stable core interests including some environmental groups but not others, such as domestic nutrition advocates and international food aid organizations. At times the supporting interests have been

closely aligned with traditional farm groups but for some farm bills there have been significant conflicts over policy objectives. Yet, in each case a compromise has been crafted, including the last farm bill when House Republicans stripped the nutrition title from their bill, but eventually consented to reinstating it, but with reduced eligibility and funding. Compromise was possible through mutually held core beliefs, namely that government has some obligation to protect the groups and interests for which the farm bill provides.

A final policy driver is the Mintrom and Norman idea of the policy entrepreneur (2009). Just as a business entrepreneur identifies a potentially profitable opportunity that is not being met by existing firms, so too does the policy entrepreneur see the potential to reform policy to better serve the needs of society. In both cases the task is to assemble the resources to implement an effort to make change, and then work to develop support for the change - in the first case by attracting customers, in the second case by attracting political support to revise policy. In the Congress the idea of members as political entrepreneurs has become more common as rules that gave power to members on the basis of seniority have been weakened and party discipline has broken down.<sup>8</sup> In addition the ever-increasing demands on individual members to raise funds for campaigns also create greater pressure for each member to be responsive to his or her electorate and financial supporters rather than party platforms.

The early decades of farm bills seems to suggest limited support for the idea of policy entrepreneurs as drivers of change. However, the 1933 Agricultural Adjustment Act was the creation of a small group of individuals at USDA and it broke completely with the approach that had been most favored up to that time, the various McNary-Haugen bills that would have created a two-price system for domestic and export markets. The long period of stability in farm legislation when Committee Chairmen controlled the legislative agenda suggests little opportunity for policy entrepreneurs. But more recently in the 1990s it is possible to identify key individuals who had great influence on farm legislation. The 1996 FAIR Act was certainly driven by the efforts of then Congressman Pat Roberts and secondarily by Senator Richard Lugar. Their proposal also owes a significant amount to an even earlier entrepreneurial effort by Senators Rudy Boschwitz and David Boren in 1985 who proposed a version of farm legislation that anticipated the FAIR Act. Finally, perhaps the greatest farm policy entrepreneur has been Congressman Jamie Whitten who used his position as Chair of the Agricultural Appropriations Subcommittee and then chairman of House Appropriations Committee to protect commodity programs for over fifty years. Whitten was familiarly known as the "Permanent Secretary of Agriculture" and his power over appropriations at a time when individual members worked to obtain funding for special projects in their

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<sup>8</sup> This does not preclude the possibility of policy entrepreneurs outside the typical political sphere. Most policy entrepreneurs are thought of as legislators or the President, acting on a policy window to form a political coalition. However, entrepreneurs can be interest groups, advocates, bureaucrats, or anyone that can use their knowledge and guile to influence policymakers into action (Kingdon 1984; Mintrom and Norman 2009).

districts through earmarks gave him great influence on any vote, and particularly farm legislation votes.

These six theories of policy change each have some value in explaining both the general persistence or stability of commodity policy and in providing explanations for the types of changes that have occurred in farm bills through time. No particular theory provides a sufficiently compelling argument to give it a primary role, although the ideas of incremental change (Lindblom), punctuated equilibrium (Baumgartner and Jones) and advocacy coalitions (Sabatier), perhaps provide the best joint explanation for the evolution of farm price support policy over the whole 1933-2014 period. More recently, the ideas of the policy entrepreneur (Mintrom and Norman) and the policy stream theory (Kingdon) are useful models for understanding the radical changes in 1996 and 2014 when farm legislation broke with the standard, first with decoupled payments as a transition to no support, and then with the use of crop insurance as a replacement for price supports and acreage restrictions.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

Agricultural economists have spent a great deal of time and effort demonstrating that commodity policies are economically inefficient and inequitable from a national perspective, but they have largely been unable to explain the persistence of these policies. Their general conclusion has been that Congress has been captured by special interests, but no coherent mechanism explaining how this process has evolved over time has been provided. Following the FAIR Act of 1996 there was a significant sense of optimism in the agricultural economics profession that the United States was at last moving toward a more desirable policy framework, although even relative optimists about the change, like Orden and Paarlberg, noted the potential for back-sliding if economic and political conditions changed.

While special interest clearly play a central role in agricultural policy, just as they play a role in any policy discussion, it is possible to construct a more complete explanation of the stability of the commodity titles over time from the political science literature on drivers of policy change. Starting from a model of rational choice by legislators who have an incentive to be re-elected and the existence of policies that have a narrow geographic benefits, it is possible to construct a coherent explanation of the stability of commodity programs using a number of models of drivers of policy change that are common in the political science literature. While these models were initially developed to understand how policy change can occur they can be turned on their head to show how a group of legislators with a strong interest in preserving price supports for specific commodities can accomplish their objective.

Our contention is that the use of existing political science theories of the policy process can provide a better way to understand the farm bill process. Notably no single theory can provide an adequate explanation for the almost eighty year period of farm bills, but each of the six models of policy change have relevance for specific

time periods. While the use of a single model would be a more elegant solution, the reality is that each farm bill occurs in a unique *milieu* comprised of: a specific President, a Congress with a particular mix of Democrats and Republicans, a farm economy that is doing well or poorly, a specific set of parallel issues on the legislative agenda at the same time as the farm bill, and other important factors. Further, as we discussed, the factors that resulted in a relatively stable set of commodity price support have been weakened over time as the explicit and implicit rules of Congress have weakened the power of committees, and particularly committee chairmen.

On the other hand, there has recently been an increase in the autonomy of individual Members, especially in the House, as the authority of party leaders has been challenged by individual members who see national priorities as threatening their chances for re-election. Now that the majority of House districts are firmly aligned with one or the other parties, the crucial factor for an incumbent is surviving the primary. This strongly reinforces the importance of defending constituent interests, which may make “log-rolling” even more important. Similarly, the end of “ear-marking” has both reduced the power of the leadership to induce Members to support party agendas, and, at the same time, made it more important for members to find alternative ways to demonstrate their ability to serve constituent interests. For incumbents from farm-oriented districts maintaining support for agriculture is one strategy.

What does this mean for future farm bills? One theory, is that the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 2014 is, like the 1996 FAIR Act, a break with the past. The argument is that Republicans care more about deficits and trade than the immediate interests of farmers. But even strong supporters of this position, for example Orden and Paarlberg, recognize that a period of low commodity prices, such as occurred in the late 1990s, may lead to a reversion to the old support mechanism. Indeed, the old programs continue to lie beneath the new approach based on crop insurance, and the provisions of the 2014 Act expire in 2019 and policy reverts to “permanent legislation”, if a new farm bill is not authorized.

In the case of the 1996 farm bill the return to the status quo occurred well before the 2002 farm bill was enacted when in 1999 the Congress, with Administration acquiescence, brought in emergency price supports that effectively ended the effort to transition farmers to a free market. In the case of the 2014 farm bill it is too early to see if the transition to a support system based on crop insurance instead of price supports will survive, but it is instructive to note that the old system of supports was largely retained but with supports set at a very low level.

On the other hand, our belief is that the 2014 legislation reflects a continuation of the ability of agricultural committees, whether led by Republicans or Democrats, to craft a bill that provides support to farmers in a way that fits both their immediate needs and the internal political context of the Congress at that point in time. Just as in 1995, when the agriculture committees took advantage of the budget allocation provided to them, and shifted support from price guarantees that were below

current market prices, to direct payments that tapped the provided budget authority; so too in 2014 a new policy structure was found that fit the times. In the 2010 through 2014 period the prospects for farm sector and farm prices were strongly positive. In this environment farmers were less concerned about price support, but did recognize the importance of risk, especially after the drought of 2012. From the perspective of most crop farmers, 2012 showed that crop insurance was a good policy option for an environment where prices were trending upward. In addition, subsidies to crop insurance premiums were a less obvious target for opponents of farm policy than traditional price supports and direct payments.

Because traditional support mechanisms largely remain in place one can conclude that the Agriculture Committees really gave up little of significance in 2014. Already corn prices have declined to a point where support programs may soon come into effect. And, while crop insurance is a useful policy for reducing variability about a trend in prices, it will provide little comfort to farmers if prices continue to trend downward over time. Several years of low crop prices will result in low levels of revenue support from crop insurance programs and are likely to trigger a call for a return to traditional price supports, just as was the case in the late 1990s.

Finally, the agricultural economics profession has seldom seen farm legislation in a larger context. Barnett, rarely among agricultural economists, recognizes the importance of path dependency and incrementalism in the construction of farm bills (2014, p.317). And, beyond the US most OECD countries also support farming through similar policies, while in the GATT negotiations developing countries have been reluctant to reduce protection for their farmers. This makes the problem of farm protection more than an American problem. But it is not only farm policy that is hard to reform. Most major policies are subject to inertia, and beneficiaries of all programs argue strongly for their continuation (Kay, 2008; Olsen 1965; Wilson, 2013). In a political environment where incumbents try to demonstrate that they are serving their particular electorate and different districts want different things, voting to end programs favored by even a small number of incumbents can be seen as creating a precedent for attacks on any policy or program. While agricultural economists might see the national interest as trumping local interests, in reality all politics remains local.

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Table 1: Party Control at the Time of Various Farm Bills and Margins of Support					
	President	Senate (D & R)	House (D & R)	Narrow Majority	Not Bipartisan
2014 Agricultural Act of 2014	D	D 54 45	R 201 234		H-D
2008 Food and Energy Security Act	R	D 49 49	D 233 198	S	
2002 Farm Security and Rural Investment Act	R	D 50 49	R 212 221	S and H	S-R
1996 Federal Agricultural Improvement and Reform Act	D	R 48 52	R 204 230	S	S-D
1990 Food Agriculture Conservation and Trade Act	R	D 55 45	D 260 175		
1985 Food Security Act	R	R 47 53	D 253 182		S-D
1981 Agriculture and Food Act	R	R 46 53	D 242 192		H-D
1977 Food and Agriculture Act	D	D 61 38	D 292 143		S-R
1973 Agriculture and Consumer Protection Act	R	D 56 42	D 242 192		H-R
1970 Agricultural Act of 1970	R	D 58 42	D 243 192		S-D
1965 Food and Agricultural Act	D	D 68 32	D 295 140		H-R
1956 Agriculture Act of 1956	R	D 47 47	D 232 203	S	
1954 Agriculture Act of 1954	R	R 46 48	R 213 221	S and H	
1949 Agriculture Act of 1949	D	D 53 43	R 263 171		
1948 Agriculture Act of 1948	D	R 45 51	R 188 246		
1938 Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938	D	D 75 17	D 333 89		
1933 Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933	D	D 59 36	D 313 117		

Table 2: Votes By Party for House and Senate Farm Bills and Conference Committee Report

	Rep Y & N		House Bill Dem Y & N		Rep Y & N		Senate Bill Dem Y & N		Rep Y & N		Conference Bill House Dem Y & N		Senate Rep Y & N		Dem Y & N			
	216	12	0	196					162	63	89	103	22	23	44	9		
2014 Agricultural Act of 2014							unanimous consent											
2008 Food and Energy Security Act	19	177	212	14	37	11	40	3	100	91	218	15	33	14	46	1		vetoed and overridden
2002 Farm Security and Rural Investmetn Act	151	58	139	61	9	38	48	2	141	73	137	68	20	28	43	7		
1996 Federal Agricultural Improvement and Reform Act	216	19	54	135			voice vote		211	17	106	72	52	1	22	25		
1990 Food Agriculture Conservation and Trade Act			unanimous consent		32	8	38	13	119	51	199	51	29	13	31	23		
1985 Food Security Act	98	79	184	62	32	14	29	14	131	47	194	49	33	15	22	23		
1981 Agriculture and Food Act	47	114	145	46	38	7	10	22	125	59	80	143	44	8	23	23		
1977 Food and Agriculture Act	68	70	226	44	21	11	48	6	64	71	219	36	21	3	42	4		
1973 Agriculture and Consumer Protection Act	87	95	139	86	29	7	47	2	53	127	198	24	34	5	50	1		
1970 Agricultural Act of 1970	87	85	125	86	24	6	41	1	75	69	116	76	27	6	21	29		
1965 Food and Agricultural Act	18	103	203	68	16	14	56	7	23	91	196	58	unanimous consent					