



\$500 Billion of Bias: Networks Ignore Farm Bill Waste, Abuse in Every Single Story

ABC, CBS and NBC worry over impact of not passing a farm bill, ignore need for reform.
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In spite of the massive half-trillion dollar price tag, the farm bill didn't get much attention from the broadcast network news shows, although a compromise version may get congressional approval very soon.

Since Jan. 1, 2013, when they reported that the nation was facing a "milk cliff" in which dairy prices would skyrocket if a farm bill wasn't passed, ABC, CBS and NBC network news programs only mentioned "farm bill" in 20 reports. The vast majority (16 stories) of those reports aired on CBS.

When they did talk about the farm bill, the networks covered it from the left complaining of the "partisan divide" caused by the GOP that frustrated passage of the mammoth bill. Not one of those network stories criticized waste, abuse or giveaways in the legislation. Just five stories, 25 percent, even used the word subsidy or subsidies.

The Associated Press reported that the House of Representatives passed a compromise bill on Jan. 29, 2014. The Washington Post said Senate approval was expected by the 31st.

The bill, which sets agriculture policy and spending for five years (roughly \$100 billion a year), sparked a political fight several times in the past year, but even the compromise bill is being criticized heavily by conservatives over its "goodies" and the meager 1 percent cut to the food stamp program. Heritage Foundation experts say that program doubled between 2008 and 2012 - - growing from \$39 billion to \$80 billion -- and along with other parts of the farm bill is in desperate need for reform.

Cato Institute noted on its Downsizing the Federal Government website that farm bill spending is way up: 49 percent compared to the 2008 farm bill. "If you are a reporter, please don't write that the farm bill 'slashes' anything," Cato said before explaining that "the 2014 farm bill not a cut at all when compared to the 2008 farm bill, which was projected to cost \$640 billion over 10 years."

Networks Worry about ‘Milk Cliff,’ Fail to Mention Conservative Worries about Waste in Farm Bill

The underlying assumptions in stories about the farm bill was that the bill was necessary and important and many Americans would be hurt if a bill wasn't past.

ABC's business correspondent Bianna Golodryga warned on Jan. 1, 2013, "World News" that "The farm bill has stalled, and subsidies have been rolled back. Without a deal securing that help for farmers, the price of a gallon of milk could shoot up to almost \$7-a-gallon. Families paying the price at the grocery store." That would be a 100-percent increase, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Meanwhile, CBS' Nancy Cordes pushed hard against conservative groups that wanted reform to spending bills on "This Morning". On Dec. 13, 2013, Cordes challenged Michael Needham of Heritage Action saying, "They tried it your way and they ended up with a three-week shutdown that wasted \$22 billion. That's not very fiscally conservative."

That CBS story specifically mentioned conservative groups' opposition to spending bills including the farm bill, but gave no explanation of their complaints about the bill.

NBC, along with CBS, lamented that ranchers suffering under and extreme drought wouldn't get the federal help they needed because the farm bill expired during the government shutdown. Those stories aired Oct. 14, 2013.

After the compromise bill was created, CBS' Scott Pelley said Jan. 27, 2014, that the agreement "matters a lot because now farmers will be able to make plans knowing how much they'll be receiving in subsidies."

Farm Bill Disappoints Conservatives with Meager Cuts and Budget Gimmicks

Americans for Prosperity called the new compromise farm bill a "huge disappointment" on Jan. 28, 2014, because it "excludes most of the reforms that we've been calling for over the past two years."

Specifically, AFP criticized the budget gimmick of scoring the five year bill for 10 years and shifting "most of the spending cuts to the out-years in the budget window, when they will probably never be realized." It also disagreed with rejoining the food stamp and farm bill portions of the bill, after they were split apart last year.

The Heritage Foundation has also called for the bills to be split apart and also urged for staggered terms to make reforms possible. According to Heritage food stamp spending "is spiraling out of control," and there are "loopholes" that lead to abuse of the program as well.

Waste is also a problem with the huge bill. Citing an Associated Press story, Kevin Glass at Townhall criticized it for the many "goodies" to different states and special interests.

A group attempting to improve government transparency has found that millions of dollars of farm subsidies are actually lining the pockets of politicians, lobbying groups and others in major cities.

Open The Books, a website that intends to track federal spending and post “every dime, online” found farm subsidies go to thousands of people that live in Washington, D.C., Chicago, and New York City, and many entities that are not farms or farmers. They issued a report in December 2013 examining fiscal year 2008-2011, noting that more than \$18 million had gone to people in the nation’s capital alone.