

Tea party should go after farm subsidies

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Here is a great editorial out of the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* on [why the tea party movement should turn its it attention toward farm subsidies](#):

The stakes really are not very large, about \$15 billion to \$20 billion per year for the U.S. as a whole. Some \$10 billion to \$15 billion is in cash payments to farmers, including land rental under the Conservation Reserve Program. Another \$5 billion or more goes into subsidized crop insurance.

For Minnesota, direct payments in 2009 came to \$852 million, of which \$114 million was for CRP acres. Overall, our state came fifth in national rankings. Neighboring states also placed high, with Iowa second, North Dakota sixth, South Dakota ninth and Wisconsin 11th.

Murray County in southwest Minnesota, where I grew up and own farmland, got \$15 million, a typical amount for the uniform rectangular counties across the southern part of the state.

These sound like big sums, but relative to total cash flows in farming, especially with growth in Asia propelling crop prices higher, they no longer are that important. The tragedy is that relative to the cost to the Treasury, they do little good for anyone.

Compared with an annual budget deficit of \$1 trillion, \$15 billion or \$20 billion saved by complete elimination of farm payments is a drop in the bucket. But so are many other programs dear to the heart of one interest group or another.

That is the point. If the tea party adherents in the new Congress are not able to completely chop out entire programs like this, their movement will quickly become a debacle, economically and politically. Committed tea party members will be bitterly disappointed by the realities of Washington, just as true believers in Supply Side economics like Reagan Budget Director David Stockman were back in 1982.

Republicans are riding the crest of an electoral triumph, but they have a great deal at stake. If they have the courage to make a symbolic move like zeroing out ag subsidies for 2011, they will send a message that they are serious about cutting wasteful spending and the overall size of government. But if farm payments get through unscathed, tea party stalwarts rightfully will read it as a bad omen.

Some Republicans, such as Tax Hike Mike Huckabee (the page from his presidential campaign is no longer active), support farm subsidies because they consider it to be a “national security” issue. The folks that typically take that view use it as an excuse to hide an anti-trade sentiment.

The Cato Institute’s [Center for Trade Policy Studies](#) offers up [six reasons why farm subsidies should be eliminated](#). The tea party movement should make that a talking on point on this issue in the next Congress.

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