

# It's time to end welfare for farmers

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By [Joanne Butler](#)

All of the Capitol Hill chest-thumping about spending cuts masks a fundamental paradox: how will Republicans make serious cuts in the entitlements their constituents love — and their local economies depend upon? Specifically, will Congressional Republicans (many of whom come from rural states and districts) make substantial cuts to [farm](#) subsidies?

Last Saturday's weekly Republican radio address gave us a great example of this paradox, when [freshman senator Ron Johnson \(R-WI\) said](#) "big government is blocking job creation" and "real reductions must be part of the solution." But on the campaign trail last October, [he claimed](#) that "most Americans" support "safety net" programs for farmers.

Does Johnson's vision of "big government" include USDA, which employs many Wisconsinites? Is he comfortable with [USDA's aerial surveillance](#) of American farms to ensure that if a certain farm is getting subsidies for a certain commodity like soybeans, that soybeans were actually planted there? I wonder if his vision for "real reductions" includes reducing the \$537 million that his state gets [annually](#) in farm subsidies — entitlements, actually.

Johnson's fellow Badger State [Republican](#), Congressman Paul Ryan, has a mixed record on ag spending. While he voted [against](#) the 2008 farm bill (which increased farm entitlements), he voted [for](#) the 2002 farm bill, which the libertarian Cato Institute says [increased subsidies by \\$45 billion](#) over five years. Ryan's district has three USDA offices and received \$15.7 million in farm entitlements in 2009.

As chairman of the House Budget Committee, Ryan could have a major impact on [agriculture](#) spending. Not only will he set the agricultural spending ceiling for the next fiscal year, he will also play an important role in placing funding limits for the 2012 farm bill, which will set farm entitlement laws for at least five years.

Will Ryan be bold and take a red pen to farm entitlements? Or will he flinch to keep farmers in his district happy? Remember, he justified his votes for TARP and the auto bailout by saying "[it's important to keep in mind where I come from.](#)"

There's more. In 2006, Ryan voted for a law (H.R. 4015) to stop Mr. Hein Hettinga, an Arizona milk processor, from independently selling milk to Costco at a lower price, by subjecting Hettinga's business to USDA's maze of mandatory pricing and marketing regulations. In what was probably a first, both the [Washington Post and Glenn Beck](#) thought this was an outrage.

Saddling entrepreneurs with big-[government](#) rules while raising prices for consumers AND voting for bailouts — I think Paul Ryan’s cheerleaders should put down their pom-poms for now.

Over in Kentucky, Senate Republican and Tea Party fave Rand Paul’s \$500 billion spending cut [proposal](#) includes tighter rules for food stamps — but not for farm entitlements. Then again, he’s living up to his promises. On the campaign trail last June, he said he was “[much more moderate](#)” on the farm spending issue than the media had portrayed. He also revealed his ignorance about ag programs when he declared that dead [farmers](#) shouldn’t receive payments. Farm entitlements are tied to specific acres (not individuals); when the landowner dies, the payments go to the next one.

Paul wants to reduce farm entitlements to 2008 levels. However, the Environmental Working Group (which uses USDA data) [reports](#) Kentucky got \$291 million in farm entitlements in 2008, which was \$30 million *more* than it received in 2009.

Incidentally, Paul the Elder (Representative Ron) saw \$64.6 million in farm entitlements flow to his 14th district of Texas in 2009, which is in the top 20% of recipients.