

# Let the Cutting Begin: Department of Agriculture

by Bill O'Connell on April 4, 2011

Share and Recommend:

0

Share

Like



Department of Agriculture<sup>1</sup>—elevated to Cabinet level at a time when agricultural employment in this country was 70–80 percent of the population. In 2008, agricultural employment was about 2–3 percent of the population. Why do we still need it? –[Liberty's Lifeline](#)

The haggling over the 2011 fiscal year budget is reaching a climax. Later this week House Budget Chairman Paul Ryan will present his budget plan for FY 2012. It promises to be extraordinary and you can expect fireworks to soon follow.

But let's start taking a top to bottom look at how our government spends money and start asking why? On some topics we will come away and say, "That makes sense. That is a fundamental responsibility of the federal government." In other cases, we will wonder either about the need to do something at all, or whether to move something to another level of government closer to the people.

## Department of Agriculture

Let's start with the Department of Agriculture

The department will spend \$142 billion in 2010, or about \$1,200 for every U.S. household. It operates 237 different subsidy programs and employs 96,000 workers in about 7,000 offices across the nation. It oversees more than 10,700 pages of regulations. – [\*Downsizing the Federal Government, The Cato Institute\*](#)

Why do we need a bigger Department of Agriculture when we are no longer a largely agrarian economy? We do still grow a lot of food, but much of it is produced by large agribusinesses. On the one hand we have crop subsidies so that the prices of food don't drop so much that farmers would be squeezed out of business. On the other hand we have a huge food stamp program because poor people need help buying food? Well which one is it? Is food too cheap or too expensive? Here is a novel approach, let the market decide.

### **Dangerous Food and Drugs**

The stock response from the left is that abolishing some of these programs would be extreme. Do we want unhealthy food and dangerous drugs on the market? Let's examine the FDA and drugs. I can't seem to turn on my television without some law firm saying call 1-800-BADDRUG, because there are dangerous drugs on the market. Really? I thought that was the reason we spend billions of dollars every year to fund the FDA. So it seems they have a problem keeping bad drugs off the market. On the flip side, let's say a new drug is invented that can keep terminally ill patients alive and let's say the projection is it will save 40,000 lives per year. If it takes the FDA ten years, typically, to approve a new drug, that means that 400,000 people will die waiting for a drug that could save their lives. So it seems that the FDA has a problem keeping bad drugs off the market and putting good drugs on the market. Since drug companies are not in business to kill people and if they do they will soon be out of business, perhaps we need to take another look at disclosing more information to the public and let the public decide whether to accept the risks. Some may say, I'm not taking any drug that hasn't been on the market for at least five years. Some may say, I will take any drug that will give me a chance, because right now I will die anyway.

The same can be said for dangerous foods. Do we really believe that every food product consumed in the U.S. has been inspected to be safe? How do we typically find out about tainted food? Is it that someone eats it and gets sick, or an inspector finds it? If it is the former, perhaps we should have disclosure of more information and put the burden of proof on the food company. If Johnson meat company sells meat with e coli and people lose their faith in Johnson meat company, they will soon be out of business.

If an information based approach is not sufficient for people to believe in their food supply, then let the states and local government decide what their citizenry wants to have. A large federal bureaucracy who is ineffective doesn't serve the purpose.

### **Spending Cuts**

Here are some suggested spending cuts from the Cato Institute that would save \$131 billion

### **Department of Agriculture**

**Proposed Spending Cuts**

Program	Spending in 2010
	(\$ million)
Agricultural Subsidies	
Farm Service Agency	\$16,584
Risk Management Agency	\$7,033
Foreign Agricultural Service	\$1,604
Nat. Inst. of Food and Agriculture	\$1,483
Agricultural Research Service	\$1,369
Agricultural Marketing Service	\$1,272
Agricultural Statistics Service	\$162
Economic Research Service	\$80
Food Subsidies	
Food Stamp program (SNAP)	\$72,482
School Lunch and related programs	\$17,307
Nutrition program (WIC)	\$7,704
Other	\$452
Rural Subsidies	

Rural Housing Service	\$1,928
Rural Utilities Service	\$613
Rural Business Coop. Service	\$297
Rural Development	\$296
Forest Service	
State and private forestry grants	\$515
Land acquisition	\$74
Explore options to restructure forests	n/a
Total proposed cuts	\$131,255
Total department outlays	\$142,016

That's my opinion; I'd like to know yours. Please comment below.

## Related Posts

- [Rand Paul Does Some Heavy Lifting](#)
- [Cutting the Federal Beast Down to Size](#)
- [The Progressive War on Federalism](#)
- [Who Inherited What?](#)
- [Agricultural Merry-Go-Round](#)
- [Junk Science Kills Tens of Millions -- Oh, Well](#)

Tagged as: [1-800-BADDRUG](#), [Agricultural Marketing Service](#), [Agricultural Research Service](#), [Agricultural Statistics Service](#), [Business/Finance](#), [Cato Institute](#), [Department of Agriculture](#), [Economic Research Service](#), [Farm Service Agency](#), [FDA](#), [Federal government](#), [Food](#), [food product](#), [food supply](#), [Foreign Agricultural Service](#), [Forest Service](#), [House Budget Chairman](#), [huge food stamp program](#), [inspector](#), [Law](#), [Nat](#), [Paul Ryan](#), [Risk Management Agency](#), [Rural Housing Service](#), [Rural Utilities Service](#), [Social Issues](#), [tainted food](#), [The Cato Institute](#), [unhealthy food](#), [United States](#), [USD](#)