



The farm bill: Millionaire-feeding boondoggle

Exclusive: Jane Chastain takes aim at \$956 billion 'tree of goodies for corporate America'

By Jane Chastain
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Some of the Democrats' leading bleeding-heart liberals found common ground this past week with the biggest corporate welfare-loving Republicans in a most unlikely source, the farm bill, which is now headed to President Obama.

Mostly Republicans in the House and mostly Democrats in the Senate came together with congressional leaders in a big Kumbaya moment to pass a bill that is an affront to every citizen who struggles to pay his or her taxes.

Most of us tune out when we hear the word "farm." In a nation that long ago moved away from an agrarian society, the closest we get to the soil these days is when we mow the lawn or wash a few drops of dirt from the produce we bring home from the market.

However, our representatives in Washington just spent more on the farm bill than was spent on the much maligned Obama stimulus, \$956.4 billion over 10 years to be exact. And this farm bill is every bit as wasteful as the aforementioned boondoggle.

Furthermore, it is a reverse Robin Hood. It robs poor taxpayers to inflate the incomes of some of the wealthiest individuals and corporations in America. As we experience one of the coldest winters in decades, it imposes a new fee on home heating oil while adding to the bounty on the tables of some of the nation's millionaires.

The new two-tenths of a cent tax on every gallon of heating oil sold is to finance the dubious National Oilheat Research Alliance. This is a glorified government-sponsored trade association. Its real purpose is to boost profits for those in the business of selling this product.

If the industry wants to improve, it should do it on its own dime. Nevertheless, a 2010 GAO report found that, despite the name, the majority of its funds went to – surprise, surprise – marketing, not research. After the GAO report came out the agency could not get enough votes for renewal on its own, so its supporters in Congress sneaked it into the farm bill. Rep. Leonard Lance, R-N.J., is among its chief supporters. He should be tarred with some of that heating oil before he is rolled in feathers and thrown out of Congress!

If the above is not a big enough insult to the average American, the bill imposes a new 15 percent tax on fresh-cut Christmas trees to, what else, create a board to promote Christmas trees!

But the farm bill is a virtual Christmas tree of goodies for corporate America. It increases the Market Access Program to \$200 million a year, which pays for the advertising campaigns of giants like McDonalds, Fruit of the Loom, Sunkist and Welch Foods.

What about all those poor farmers we hear so much about? The Cato Institute reports that in 2011, the average incomes of farm households was \$87,289, or 25 percent more than the \$69,677 average of all households. But it's worse than that: In recent years, 4 percent of the nation's largest agribusiness collected a whopping 74 percent of all farm subsidies, giants like Tyson's Foods and Pilgrim's Pride. Millionaire farmland owners like Ted Turner and Mark Rockefeller also were on the take.

Where is the outrage?

By far the lion's share of the money, \$756 billion, in the farm bill goes to the food stamp program. Conservatives and libertarians have been trying to extricate food stamps from the farm bill so these programs can be examined on their own. However, Republicans like Thad Cochran of Mississippi helped to block the attempt because they know the farm bill wouldn't stand a chance if the Supplemental Nutritional Assistant Program were removed.

As for SNAP, it needs major reforms. However, all attempts to bring some accountability to the program were rejected. Presently, people with millions of dollars in assets can and are being qualified simply because they are no longer drawing a salary. Means testing and work requirements were not considered reasonable by the majority of our representatives.

In reality, all you have to do to qualify for the free food is put your lazy, greedy hand out.

Some say the so-called reforms that are being touted amount to reshuffling the deck chairs. I say they amount to throwing out the deck chairs and replacing them with more expensive models.

Our illustrious representatives are trying to convince us that the bill they just passed saves us \$16 billion when, in reality, it spends 50 percent more than its predecessor. Only in Washington can a 50 percent hike in spending be called a cut!