



## **Socialism is already here — down on the farm**

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The fellow from down east was fed up with his neighbors calling Democrats “socialists.” He fumed, “Some of the people yelling loudest about socialists are the biggest socialists around.”

How’s that?

“They’re farmers, and they get farm subsidies, agriculture programs, crop price supports and, now, payments to farmers hurt by Trump’s tariffs. Isn’t that socialism?”

This man has nothing against farmers — or farm programs. In fact, he used to own a farm.

“I’m all for agriculture,” he said. “I just don’t like hypocrites.”

Critics — on the right and left — agree.

The conservative Cato Institute bluntly calls the 2018 Farm Bill “socialism”:

“It will spend \$867 billion over the next decade, thus pushing up government debt and taxes ... At its core is central planning, which is obvious when you consider that the bill is 807 pages of legalese laying out excruciating details on crop prices, acres, yields, and other micromanagement. Furthermore, the bill lines the pockets of wealthy elites (landowners), which is a central feature of socialism in practice around the world.”

A conservative website called “Downsizing the Federal Government” chimes in:

“The federal government spends more than \$20 billion a year on subsidies for farm businesses. About 39 percent of the nation’s 2.1 million farms receive subsidies, with the lion’s share of the handouts going to the largest producers of corn, soybeans, wheat, cotton, and rice.

“The government protects farmers against fluctuations in prices, revenues, and yields. It subsidizes their conservation efforts, insurance coverage, marketing, export sales, research, and other activities. Federal aid for crop farmers is deep and comprehensive.”

Then there are the federal payments that President Trump ordered for farmers hurt by his trade war with China. They total \$26 billion so far, and Trump tweeted this weekend that another round is coming before Thanksgiving.

“Morning Joe” Scarborough called it “pure socialism.”

Liberals don’t like it any more than conservatives. The liberal Environmental Working Group says:

“Farm bailout payments intended to offset the impacts of President Trump’s trade war have instead flowed to an estimated more than 9,000 ‘city slickers’ who live in the nation’s largest cities.”

The poster boy could be the conservative Democrat-turned-Republican governor of West Virginia, Jim Justice. Justice is said to be the only billionaire in West Virginia. A farming business owned by his family received \$125,000 in soybean and corn subsidies, the maximum allowed from Trump’s “replacement money.”

Then there’s the “price support and stabilization program” that governed North Carolina’s tobacco farms for more than 70 years, from the 1930s to 2004.

The Congressional Research Service described the program this way:

“Federal law specified a guaranteed minimum price for leaf tobacco. The price guarantee was achieved by controlling supply. Each tobacco farm was assigned a marketing quota that balanced national production with domestic and export demand. Any tobacco that did not bring at least the guaranteed price was purchased by a ‘price stabilization cooperative’.”

“Guaranteed prices.” “Controlling supply.” “Price stabilization cooperative.”

Sounds like the Soviet Union.

Over the next year, you’ll hear a lot of talk about “socialism” from President Trump and Republicans. They’ve already attacked ideas like Medicare For All, the Green New Deal and wealth taxes.

Just like the farm programs, those ideas would shift money from one group of Americans to another. Just like Social Security and Medicare.

What’s the difference?

One North Carolina politician who’s been involved in farm policy for a long time put it this way: “Most people think: ‘If it benefits me, it’s not socialism’.”