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Daily Mail editorial: Farm bill defeat a plus for better government

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There's no reason to be upset that the U.S. House of Representatives last Friday voted down excess government bloat commonly referred to as the farm bill.

The Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018 failed on a 213-198 vote. The 'for' votes were from Republicans, while the 213 nay votes were from all the House's Democrats and 30 Republicans.

But why 198 Republicans favor continuing gargantuan government giveaways to rich and poor alike is anybody's guess.

While a farm bill might conjure up images of a benevolent government propping up struggling marginal farmers to help keep food plentiful and costs down, the farm bill is anything but.

The farm bill is a "cornucopia of subsidies," wrote The Heritage Foundation's Senior Research Fellow in Agriculture Policy [Daren Bakst](#). "As written, the bill should embarrass anyone who claims to be a conservative, believes in free markets or simply hates cronyism."

Coming on the heels of The [Bipartisan Budget Act](#) of 2018 that busted previous spending limits on non-defense spending by 311 percent, the farm bill is further evidence that practically no one in Congress, Democrat or Republican, cares to reduce overall government spending.

The bill would have cost taxpayers at least \$867 billion over 10 years, according to the [Cato Institute](#).

"The essence of the farm bill is a giant log roll," says Cato scholar [Chris Edwards](#). "Much of the spending likely does not have majority support in Congress or among the public, so politicians mash together hand-outs to different groups in a broad farm-food omnibus."

Ironically, it wasn't the size of the quinquennial Congressional exercise that did the farm bill in. Instead, it was the 30 House Freedom Caucus members demanding a separate vote on a measure to toughen immigration enforcement.

But the size, scope and bloat of the farm bill is a national embarrassment.

Not that there aren't good things in the farm bill, as proposed. Agriculture Commissioner Kent Leonhardt [told the Gazette-Mail's](#) Jake Zuckerman he supported the bill for many of the good things it does for West Virginia.

Leonhardt said the bill helps maple syrup producers; aids efforts to bring fresh food to schools; offers land and water conservation efforts through the Natural Resources Conservation Service; and provides funds to combat invasive species, like the emerald ash borer insect and the multiflora rose bush.

He also said he expected that lawmakers would add in language to either decriminalize hemp for industrial purposes or remove it from the federal definition of marijuana, and streamline the seed certification process.

But what is good about the farm bill can be saved, as it will surely be brought up again before the current farm bill expires Sept. 30.

Instead of passing a gigantic bill every five years, it's time for America to have a true debate on the merits and excesses of the bill.

“Should we be giving \$20 billion a year to Wall Street farmers?” asks Chris Edwards of the Cato Institute. “The subsidies are concentrated in the most wealthy landowners in America. The 10 percent biggest and wealthiest farms get 60 percent of all the subsidies from Washington. It's completely absurd. ... It's grotesque.”

Like too many other measures, Congress avoids the hard work of breaking down a bill into its individual components and addressing the most important ones separately. But that's what Congress should do on the farm bill.