

## **This farm bill is just as bad as it could possibly be**

*How liberals and conservatives conspire on bad government.*

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How many ways can one bill be wrong? The U.S. Senate has pushed the limits with passage of its version of a “farm” bill that will cost nearly \$1 trillion over 10 years. Sadly, both Republican Sen. Dan Coats and Democratic Sen. Joe Donnelly voted in favor of it. And why not? The Indiana farming community received \$10.3 billion in subsidies from 1995 to 2012, ranking 11th of the 50 states. That’s a lot of pork to protect.

And much of it amounts to corporate welfare. Fully 74 percent of the money went to just 10 percent of the farms. Small, family farms aren’t being protected. Giant agribusiness interests are being subsidized. And even red state conservatives like Coats go along. “It is always easier to cut the other guy’s subsidies,” notes Cato Institute fellow Michael D. Tanner.

And the corporate welfare portion is just a small part of the problem – the biggest is actual welfare of the old-fashioned kind. We put “farm” in quotation marks on the first reference because money for that activity amounts to only 20 percent of the bill. The other 80 percent of the money goes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, better known as food stamps, a staggering \$764 billion. The Senate would spend about \$4 billion less than that in the current bill, while some House Republicans want to cut \$20 billion. Big whoop.

This is how we get bad government that is too big and too wasteful – alleged conservatives and alleged liberals colluding to protect their constituents’ interest. Democrats not crazy about the farm payouts go along because they want to protect the food stamps. Republicans not especially fond of the food stamps go along because of the farm payouts. At the very least, farming and food stamps should be separated into different bills so there can be an honest debate about each.

Americans get screwed by much more than just the waste of their tax money – subsidies distort the market and impose higher food costs on everybody. The Senate version continues a sugar subsidy that raises the price of sweets and even includes a new sweetheart deal for the dairy industry. Crop-insurance subsidies will continue the insane practice of giving farmers financial incentive to take excessive risks without having to worry about crop failures.

There is hope that the final House version of the bill will be slightly less expensive and slightly more defensible. But slightly isn’t good enough. Congress needs to rethink the whole approach to agricultural subsidization. What we’re doing now just does not make any sense.