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Voting begins on near \$1 trillion Senate farm bill

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Washington -- The Senate began voting Tuesday on 73 amendments to a new farm bill that will cost nearly \$1 trillion over the next decade, pitting rural lawmakers from both parties against a coalition of fiscal conservatives and food and environmental activists trying to cut back on subsidies to corn and other commodities.

About 80 percent of the \$969 billion bill goes for food stamps, which are used by nearly 1 in 7 Americans.

The rest of the money goes chiefly to support commodities, farm conservation and forestry. The farm bill is considered every five years, and sets federal nutrition policy in big federal food programs and environmental policy on millions of acres of farmland, including about a quarter of California.

Agriculture Committee Chair Debbie Stabenow, D-Minn., hailed the bill as a major reform because it shifts spending from traditional farm subsidies to heavily subsidized crop insurance, along with a new entitlement program that protects commodity grain and cotton growers from even small dips in their income. The bill cuts conservation programs by \$6.5 billion, or 10 percent, and food stamps by \$4.5 billion.

A vote on final passage is expected by the end of the week. Senate passage would put pressure on fiscally conservative House Republicans, many of whom support farm subsidies, to find savings. House leaders are considering much deeper cuts to food stamps, while maintaining commodity supports.

The reform lobby argued that the farm sector, riding a commodity boom that sent net farm income to a record \$98 billion last year, does not need any more taxpayer aid for corn, soybean, wheat, cotton and rice farmers.

The Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, said 2010 census figures put the average farm household income at \$84,400, which was 25 percent higher than the \$67,530 average of all U.S. households.

The Senate refused to take up an amendment by Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., that would have made into a national standard California's humane regulations for egg-laying hens, passed by a voter initiative in 2008 as [Proposition 2](#).

The amendment was pushed by the Humane Society of the United States and national egg producers, who sought uniform national standards. But Feinstein was not allowed a vote after pressure from national farm groups that feared it would set a precedent for animal-rights activists to pressure other livestock producers for humane treatment of farm animals.

Feinstein vowed to pursue national standards by other legislative means.

Senate negotiators also refused to consider an amendment by Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., and Pat Toomey, R-Pa., that would have capped crop insurance subsidies at \$40,000 per farmer, saving more than \$5 billion.

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