

WELCOME TO THE 118TH CONGRESS AND ANOTHER “FARM BILL YEAR”

Now that Committees have been formed and the rosters filled, the work to draft a new farm bill will begin in earnest. As expected, oversight, fiscal restraint, and a more open legislative process have become the centerpieces of this Republican House majority. Combined with a sense of urgency from Senate Democrats around the farm bill as the vehicle for any 2023 climate priorities, key negotiating lines are already emerging. As such, we wanted to share a preview of the House and Senate Agriculture Committees and provide a quick reference for each member’s background and priorities.

House Committee on Agriculture

As newly minted House Agriculture Committee Chairman GT Thompson (R-PA) said upon being elected to lead the committee, “We will keep our foot on the gas to deliver principled solutions, robust oversight, and a Farm Bill that is responsive to the needs of the country’s farmers, ranchers, and foresters.” He has been vocal about his desire to work with the budget committee on the pathway forward for a bipartisan farm bill. Most importantly, the Committee leaders have pledged to conduct a robust review of the needs of rural America through the lens of the farm bill and the opportunities that it provides.

In addition to the work of the farm bill, the House Committee will be focused on oversight of USDA, including their implementation of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), the use of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) funding for the climate-smart commodities program, and funding spent during COVID relief packages.

On the Republican side, four former Agriculture Committee members have transitioned to “A” committees. Six additional members received waivers to continue serving on “A” committees like House Financial Services and House Energy and Commerce and Ways and Means.

Veteran Roster?

The headline grabber from the new roster is former Chairman Frank Lucas’ (R-OK) return to the committee. Adding to the experience of the chairman and ranking member, 8 Republicans and 2 Democrats who were members of the committee for the 2018 Farm Bill. Of those, only 5 Republicans and 2 Democrats were members of Congress for the 2014 Farm Bill.

Departing the Committee for Grade “A” Pastures

In the House, Ways and Means, Appropriations, Energy and Commerce, and Financial Services are considered “A” committees, and members are typically restricted to serving on “B” committees due to the extensive jurisdiction and time commitment required. Many of these “A” committees have jurisdictions like tax, trade, and environmental regulation that are extremely vital to agriculture. During this year, it has been surprising to see the number of members who have been given waivers to serve on both “A” Committees and on the House Agriculture Committee. This is likely a product of the many new positions available to fill as Republicans assume the gavel. It’s important to note that committee leaders on several other committees have roots in the House Ag Committee or have been active in this policy and have assisted greatly. T&I Chairman Sam Graves (R-MO) and Budget Chairman Jodey Arrington (R-TX) formerly served on the committee. Other Chairmen have engaged extensively in previous farm bills that have carried their priorities such as categorical exclusions authored by Natural Resources Chairman Westermann (R-AR). Additionally, Ways and Means Chairman Jason Smith (R-MO) and Energy and Commerce Chairwomen McMorris –Rogers (R-WA) have supported farm bills and championed issues for producers in their districts.

Members departing the committee for “A” committee assignments:

- Rep. Michelle Fischbach - Ways and Means
- Rep. Rick Allen - Energy and Commerce
- Rep. Trop Balderson - Energy and Commerce
- Rep. Michael Cloud - Appropriations

New, Fresh Faces

The committee is also welcoming multiple new members in both parties with diverse regional and professional backgrounds to the committee, including farmers and veterans. These backgrounds combined with their fresh perspectives will be helpful in the upcoming policy debates.

House Republicans

- Rep. John Rose (TN-06)
- Rep. Ronny Jackson (TX-13)
- Rep. Mark Alford (MO-04)
- Rep. Lori Chavez-DeRemer (OR-05)
- Rep. Monica De La Cruz (TX-15)
- Rep. John Duarte (CA-13)
- Rep. Nick Langworthy (NY-23)
- Rep. Max Miller (OH-07)
- Rep. Marc Molinaro (NY-19)
- Rep. Zach Nunn (IA-03)
- Rep. Derrick Van Orden (WI-03)

House Democrats

- Rep. Yadira Caraveo (CO-08)
- Rep. Andrea Salinas (OR-06)
- Rep. Marie Gluesenkamp Perez (WA-03)
- Rep. Don Davis (NC-01)
- Rep. Jill Tokuda (HI-02)
- Rep. Nikki Budzinski (IL-13)
- Rep. Greg Casar (TX-35)
- Rep. Jasmine Crockett (TX-30)
- Rep. Jonathan Jackson (IL-01)
- Rep. Eric Sorensen (IL-17)
- Rep. Gabe Vasquez (NM-02)

Senate Committee on Agriculture

Few New Faces, Long Track-records

The makeup of the Senate Agriculture Committee is much more static than its House counterpart. The only departing member of the Committee was former Chair Patrick Leahy (D-VT) who retired at the end of his term in January 2023. Vermont House member Peter Welch, was elected to serve in his place in November, and Welch has now assumed the vacant Leahy seat on the Agriculture Committee. The other new member of the Senate Committee is newly elected Sen. John Fetterman (D-PA), who joins Sen. Welch in focusing on dairy interests of their states as well as conservation, forestry, land access, and equity in agriculture.

Chairwoman Stabenow (D-MI) starts this farm bill cycle with the enviable position of being the only member of the “Big Four” Chairs and Ranking Members of the Agriculture Committees to have served in the same role during a previous farm bill.

While not a former Big Four leader for a farm bill, Senator John Boozman (R-AR) has served as a key member of the Committee for the 2014 and 2018 Farm Bills, and even served as a floor surrogate for then-Ranking Member Thad Cochran during the 2014 process.

Big Issues to Track

- Debt Limit Negotiations – do farm and nutrition programs get swept into discussions?
 - On January 19th, Treasury confirmed that the federal government had reached its \$31.4 trillion borrowing cap. Treasury can now use a maneuver called “extraordinary measures” to prolong the need for a cap raise but those measures are expected to run-out this summer, forcing a decision on the hill.
- Open amendment process on the House floor – how will opponents of farm and food policy force votes?
 - Speaker McCarthy (R-CA) has promised to provide a more open process for members to engage on the floor, allowing more open rules that are less restrictive to what amendments will and will not receive votes. In the past, the rules committee has been a strong gatekeeper for leadership to limit votes on amendments that could threaten the final passage of a bill or key programs.
- Retirements and 2024 map – will the four corners be motivated to cut a deal well ahead of elections?
 - With Senator Stabenow announcing her retirement at the end of this Congress and other Senators up for reelection in a Presidential election year, what impact does that have on policy decisions and timing? Members from Ohio, Minnesota, and the open seat in Michigan will all factor into Chairwoman Stabenow’s thinking around timing and policy.