House and Senate pass versions of the 2018 Farm Bill

June 28, 2018

Following the House passage of the Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018 (H.R. 2) by party line vote on June 21, the Senate amended H.R. 2 with text from S. 3042, the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, and an amendment providing a one-year extension of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). The Senate passed the bill on June 28 before breaking for July recess. The chambers are expected to conference the two versions of the “farm bill” with hopes to reauthorize numerous U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs set to expire on September 30, 2018.

Every five years, Congress is tasked with passing legislation that sets national policy for agriculture, nutrition, conservation, and forestry, commonly referred to as the “farm bill.” Introduced by Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Chairman Pat Roberts (R-KS), the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 seeks to provide certainty and predictability for farmers and ranchers by addressing some of the economic challenges they face while continuing funds for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients. The bipartisan bill was marked up and approved by the committee on June 13.

The Senate’s 2018 farm bill proposes various reforms to the Agriculture Department while preserving the Conservation Stewardship Program, which the House version of the bill would eliminate. The Senate bill would keep steady funding across conservation programs in a broad sense, although it includes provisions on farmer eligibility for certain payment programs and adjustments to other individual programs. The final amended version expands haying and grazing on land set aside in the Conservation Reserve Program. Modeled after DARPA and ARPA-E, the bill authorizes an Agriculture Advanced Research and Development Authority (AGARDA) pilot program at $50 million over the next five years to target high-priority research needs for qualified products and projects, agricultural technologies, and research tools. The bill also adds soil health to priority research in the Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative and adds carbon dioxide sequestration and utilization in the priorities for the USDA’s biomass research and development.

Sources: E&E News; U.S. House, Committee on Agriculture; U.S. Senate, Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.