

Since the 1930s, agricultural policies in America have been set by what is typically referred to as "The Farm Bill." This expansive piece of legislation, usually updated and renewed every five years, directs the administration of farm policies in areas such as crop support payments, farm credit, rural housing needs, conservation incentives and nutrition programs.

The current Farm Bill expires later this year. This week, as a member of the House Agriculture Committee, I helped craft and voted to advance the committee's Farm Bill proposal, which was approved on a bipartisan vote of 35-11 following a robust debate.

Agriculture is critical to not only our food security, but also to America's economic security, energy security, and national security. A new Farm Bill is imperative for the future of agriculture and rural America. This proposal charts a new way forward for America's farmers and ranchers while respecting the federal government's severe budgetary constraints with program reductions.

Three of my initiatives were included in the committee's legislation. The Beginning Farmers amendment modifies and builds upon existing farm programs to help overcome the steep financial burdens new farmers face as they establish agricultural businesses. Another amendment provides microloans to small, beginning, and veteran farmers seeking farm credit. These efforts are aimed to address the demographic challenges in agriculture; the average age of the American farmer is 56 years old. I also sponsored an amendment to enhance the Farmers Market and Local Foods Promotion Program, an effort that increases market opportunities for small and mid-sized farms and strengthens local food systems.

During the bill-writing process, I also took the opportunity to raise several important policy considerations, including tightening farm payment limitations, making rural housing programs more accessible, and protecting environmentally delicate lands for conservation purposes.

Congress needs to pass a farm bill prior to its expiration at the end of September. While this proposal is not perfect, it provides adequate protection options for farmers, supports young and beginning farmers, and embraces new market opportunities domestically and internationally while reducing spending. I look forward to continuing this important discussion about our country's agricultural future on the House floor in the coming weeks.

