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Farm Bills: Major Legislative Actions, 1965-2018

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Summary

The farm bill provides an opportunity for Congress to address agricultural and food issues comprehensively about every five years. Over time, farm bills have tended to become more complicated and politically sensitive. As a result, the timeline for reauthorization has become less certain. With the exception of the 2018 farm bill, recent farm bills have taken longer to enact than in previous decades. Beginning in 2008, farm bills have been subject to various developments that have delayed enactment, such as insufficient votes to pass the House floor, presidential vetoes, or short-term extensions.

The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-334), often called the "2018 farm bill," was enacted on December 20, 2018. In the House, the Agriculture Committee reported the bill on April 18, 2018. An initial floor vote on May 18 failed in the House 198-213, but floor procedures allowed that vote to be reconsidered (H.Res. 905). The House passed H.R. 2 in a second vote of 213-211 on June 21. In the Senate, the Agriculture Committee reported its bill (S. 3042) on June 13, 2018, by a vote of 20-1. The Senate passed its bill as an amendment to H.R. 2 by a vote of 86-11 on June 28. Conference proceedings officially began on September 5, 2018, and concluded in December with a Senate vote of 87-13 and a House vote of 369-47 (H.Rept. 115-1072).

The 2018 farm bill took 8 months from introduction to passage. By comparison, the 2014 farm bill took more than 21 months from introduction to enactment, and spanned the 112th and 113th Congresses. The 2008 farm bill took more than a year to enact and was complicated by revenue provisions from another committee of jurisdiction, temporary extensions, and vetoes.

Most farm bills have been introduced in the first session of a two-year Congress (the odd-numbered year). Three of the farm bills that were introduced in the second session—the 1970, 1990, and 2018 farm bills—were enacted during a lame duck Congress of the same year. The 2014 farm bill was the first farm bill to start in one Congress (2012), remain unfinished, and require reintroduction in a subsequent Congress.

This report examines the major legislative milestones for the last 12 farm bills covering 54 years.

Contents

Timelines for Enactment, Extension, and Vetoes 1
Timeline Relative to Fiscal Years 1
Timeline Relative to Calendar Years 3
Timeline Relative to the Two-Year Congressional Term 3
House or Senate Action First 3
Short-Term Extensions 4
Presidential Vetoes 4
Implications for Congress 4

Figures

Figure 1. Major Legislative Actions on Farm Bills, 2018-1965 2

Tables

Table 1. Major Legislative Actions on Farm Bills, 2018-1965 5

Contacts

Author Information 8

The farm bill provides an opportunity for Congress to address agricultural and food issues comprehensively about every five years.[1] Over time, farm bills have tended to become more complicated and politically sensitive. This has made the timeline for reauthorization less certain. Recent farm bills have been subject to developments that have delayed enactment, such as insufficient votes to pass the House floor, presidential vetoes, and short-term extensions.

The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-334), often called the "2018 farm bill," was enacted on December 20, 2018. In the House, the Agriculture Committee reported the bill on April 18, 2018. An initial floor vote on May 18 failed by 198-213, but procedures allowed that vote to be reconsidered (H.Res. 905). The House passed H.R. 2 in a second vote of 213-211 on June 21. In the Senate, the Agriculture Committee reported its bill (S. 3042) on June 13, 2018, by a vote of 20-1. The Senate passed its bill as an amendment to H.R. 2 by a vote of 86-11 on June 28. Conference proceedings officially began September 5 and concluded on December 10.

The 1973 farm bill was enacted less than 3 months after being introduced. In contrast, the 2014 farm bill took more than 21 months from introduction to enactment, spanning two Congresses.[2] The House rejected a bill in 2013 and then passed separate farm and nutrition assistance components—the first time a chamber-passed farm bill did not include a nutrition title since 1973. The House later procedurally recombined them for conference with the Senate.

Both the 2002 and 2008 farm bills had expired for about three months (from October through December in 2007 and 2012) before extensions were enacted. In each case, the fiscal year began under a continuing resolution for appropriations. The extensions of the 2002 farm bill were for relatively short periods totaling about five months during final House-Senate negotiations. However, the extension of the 2008 farm bill in 2013 was for a full year.

This report examines the major legislative milestones for the last 12 farm bills over 54 years, a period representing modern farm bills with growing complexity. **Table 1** contains a history of major legislative action on farm bills since 1965. **Figure 1** shows the major dates on a timeline.

Timelines for Enactment, Extension, and Vetoes

Different parts of a farm bill are authorized for different periods of time. Fiscal years, calendar years, and crop years can be important to different programs. Programs authorized by the 2018 farm bill (the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018) would generally expire either at the end of FY2023 (September 30, 2023) or after the 2023 crop year, which varies among crops.

Timeline Relative to Fiscal Years

Enacting farm bills after the end of the final fiscal year for which programs have been authorized has been a common occurrence. In the past 42 years covering the nine farm bills since 1976—when the federal government began using a fiscal year that began on October 1[3]—only the 1977 and 2002 farm bills were enacted before the September 30 expiration date for programs that would have been affected by the fiscal year.[4]

[1] See CRS In Focus IF10187, *Farm Bill Primer: What Is the Farm Bill?*

[2] These dates span only the official introduction of a bill marked up by committee until the President signed the bill. They do not include background hearings before committee markup, which would extend the timeline.

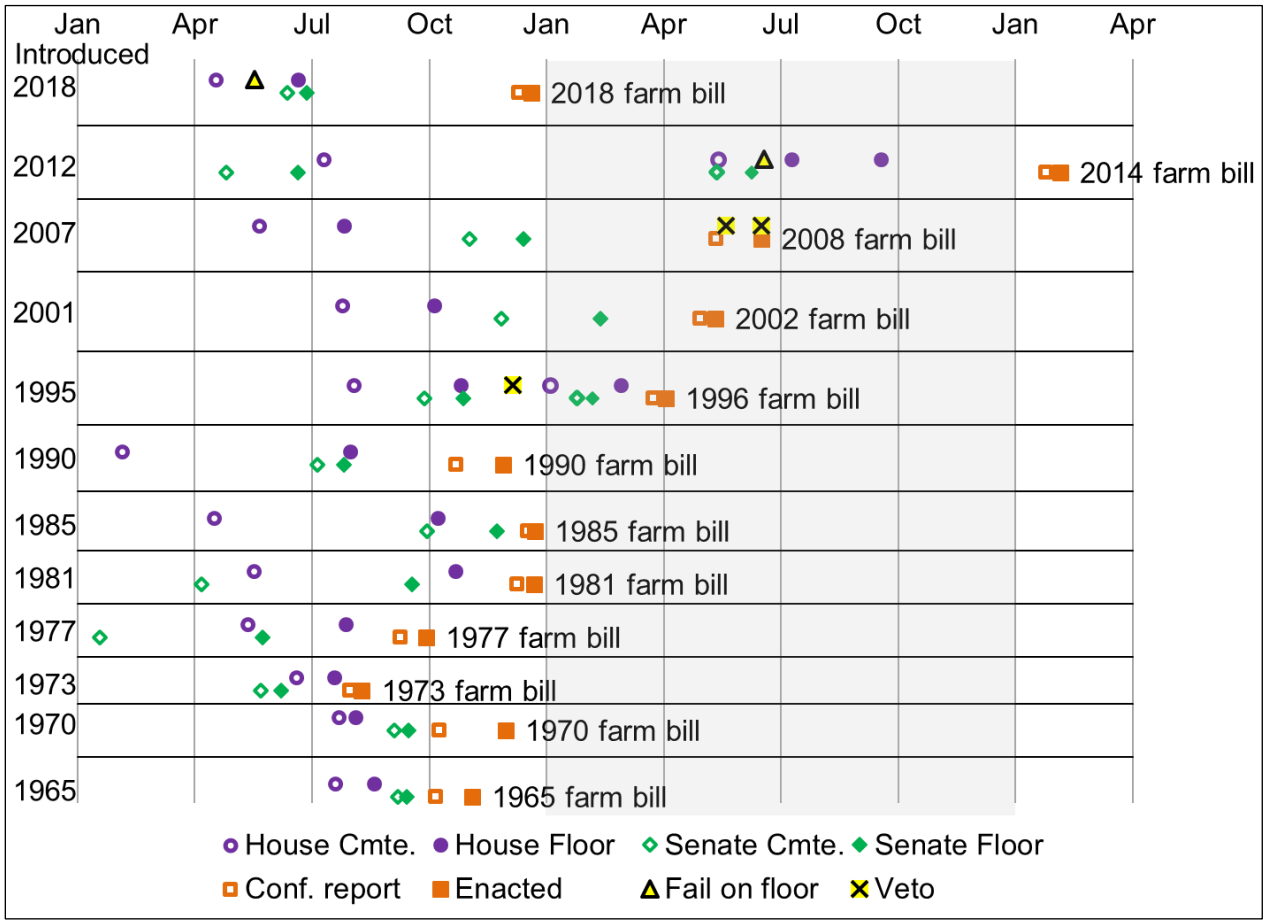
[3] The federal fiscal year changed in 1976. A "transition quarter" was added to move the beginning of the fiscal year from July 1 to October 1. See Office of Management and Budget, *Historical Tables: Budget of the U.S. Government*.

[4] Before the 1973 farm bill, which was the first to incorporate reauthorization of the food stamp program that had a

The 1981, 1985, 1990, and 2018 farm bills were enacted within three months after the final fiscal year for which programs were authorized ended. The 1996 farm bill was enacted in April 1996 following the September 30, 1995, expiration of some of the authorizations in the 1990 farm bill.[5] The 2008 and 2014 farm bills were enacted well after their original September 30 expirations and following the enactment of extensions.

Expiration at the end of a fiscal year (September 30) matters for programs with fiscal year authorizations. These programs include certain nutrition, conservation, and trade programs; various agricultural programs, excluding the Title I commodity programs; and many authorizations for discretionary appropriations. The consequences of expiration of a farm bill are discussed in other CRS reports.[6]

Figure 1. Major Legislative Actions on Farm Bills, 2018-1965



Source: CRS, using http://www.congress.gov.

fiscal year expiration, the focus of the farm bill was the farm commodity programs that operated by crop years.

[5] While the 1996 farm bill was not pressured by the expiration of farm commodity programs in the 1990 farm bill—since budget reconciliation in 1993 had extended them through the 1996 and 1997 crop years (see footnote 7)—some of the original FY1995 expiration dates for food stamps, certain conservation programs, and various authorizations of appropriations continued unchanged and had not been extended by the reconciliation act.

[6] For example, see explanations in CRS Report R45341, *Expiration of the 2014 Farm Bill*.

Timeline Relative to Calendar Years

All farm bills since 1965—except the 2008 and 2014 farm bills—have been enacted before December 31 in the year of their expirations.[7] Therefore, only the 2008 and 2014 farm bills have required extensions (see "Short-Term Extensions" below).

From another perspective, the 1990 farm bill was the last farm bill prior to the 2018 farm bill that was enacted by December 31—within three months from the start of fiscal-year expiration but before the spring-planted crops covered by the new law were planted. The 1996, 2002, 2008, and 2014 farm bills were enacted in a calendar year after their introduction—in April (1996), May (2002), June (2008), and February (2014)—but still prior to the first crop covered by the farm bill being harvested.

Expiration at the end of a calendar year matters mostly for the dairy program, one of the farm commodity programs in Title I of recent farm bills. The farm commodity programs are tied to crop years—that is, the year in which a crop is harvested—and dairy is the first commodity that would be affected by reverting to "permanent law," since its crop year begins on January 1 after the year of expiration.[8]

Timeline Relative to the Two-Year Congressional Term

Since 1965, 8 out of 12 enacted farm bills were introduced in the first session of a two-year Congress (the odd-numbered year). The other four (1970, 1990, 2014, and 2018) were introduced in the second session of a two-year Congress (the even-numbered year).[9] The 2018 farm bill was the first time since before 1965 that both chambers completed floor action before the end of June.

Of the four bills introduced in a second session, the 1970, 1990, and 2018 farm bills were enacted during a lame duck Congress (after an election) in November and December of the same year. The 2014 farm bill, which was introduced in 2012, was the first farm bill to start in one Congress, remain unfinished, and require reintroduction in a subsequent Congress.

House or Senate Action First

The House and Senate have taken turns in initiating action on a farm bill. Since 1965, the Senate was first to mark up farm bills in 1973, 1977, 1981, 2012, and 2013. The House was first to mark up bills in 1965, 1970, 1985, 1990, 1995 (and 1996), 2001, 2007, and 2018.

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[7] The 1965 farm bill was extended for one year, but that extension occurred more than a year before expiration and before the reauthorization process had begun in 1970. The 1996 and 2002 farm bills may appear to have been delayed by being reintroduced (1996) or going through the new year into May (2002), but their predecessors did not require extensions. The 1990 farm bill's original expiration date of the end of the 1995 crop year had less of an effect on the 1996 farm bill's timeline because budget reconciliation in 1993 had extended the farm commodity programs through at least 1996 and, in some cases, the 1997 crops. The 2002 farm bill was enacted before the 1996 farm bill expired on September 30, 2002, and before the 2002 crop year ended. In fact, the 2002 farm bill superseded the last year of the 1996 farm bill by beginning with the 2002 crop year.

[8] *Permanent law* refers to non-expiring farm commodity programs that are generally from the 1938 and 1949 farm bills. The temporary suspension of permanent law is included as a section in all recent farm bills. If the suspension of permanent law were to expire at the end of a crop year, the permanent law provisions would take effect unless a new farm bill, or an extension of the most recent bill, continues the suspension. For more details about permanent law and its consequences, see the heading on permanent law in CRS Report R45341, *Expiration of the 2014 Farm Bill*.

[9] Technically, the bill that became the 2014 farm bill (H.R. 2642) was introduced in 2013 (the first session of the 113th Congress), but many consider it a reintroduction of the bills started in 2012 (the second session of the 112th Congress).

Short-Term Extensions

Extensions of a prior farm bill while its successor is being written have been atypical. Only the 2002 and 2008 farm bills have required extensions in 2007-2008 and 2013, respectively, as their successors were being written.[10]

When the 2002 farm bill expired, portions of it were extended six times for less than a year total beginning in December 2007.[11] When the 2008 farm bill expired, the entire farm bill was extended in January 2013 for all of FY2013 and the 2013 crop year.[12] While the 2014 farm bill was expired from October 1 until the 2018 farm bill was enacted, the continuing resolution for appropriations continued many operations, though some new program activity ceased.[13]

Presidential Vetoes

Presidential vetoes of farm bills are not common. Since 1965, only the 2008 farm bill has been vetoed as stand-alone measure; it was vetoed twice. A 1995 farm bill was vetoed as part of a larger budget reconciliation package.

President George W. Bush vetoed the 2008 farm bill (H.R. 2419). When Congress overrode the veto to enact P.L. 110-234, it accidentally enrolled the law without Title III (the trade title). Congress immediately reintroduced the same bill with the trade title (H.R. 6124). President Bush vetoed this version as well, and Congress again overrode the veto to enact P.L. 110-246, a complete 2008 farm bill that included the trade title. The overrides in 2008 were the only time that a farm bill was enacted as a result of a veto override.

President Clinton vetoed a 1995 budget reconciliation package that included the first version of what became the 1996 farm bill, but the veto was not due to the farm bill itself but rather the controversial nature of the reconciliation bill in which the farm bill was embedded.

Prior to 1965, the first veto of a farm bill was in 1956, when President Eisenhower vetoed H.R. 12 (84th Congress), the first version of the Agricultural Act of 1956.

Implications for Congress

As farm bill reauthorization has tended to become more complex and engender greater political sensitivity, the process of enacting a new farm bill prior to the expiration of the existing law has become more difficult. As stakeholders in the farm bill have become more diverse, more people are affected by the legislative uncertainty around this process. This lack of certainty may translate into questions about the availability of future program benefits, some of which may affect agricultural production decisions or market uncertainty for agricultural commodities.

[10] See also footnote 7 and the section "Timeline Relative to Calendar Years."

[11] CRS Report RL34154, *Possible Expiration (or Extension) of the 2002 Farm Bill*.

[12] CRS Report R42442, *Expiration and Extension of the 2008 Farm Bill*.

[13] CRS Report R45341, *Expiration of the 2014 Farm Bill*.

Table 1. Major Legislative Actions on Farm Bills, 2018-1965

	House		Senate		Conference Report Approval			
	Cmte.	**Passage**	**Cmte.**	**Passage**	**Conf. Report**	**House Passage**	**Senate Passage**	**Public Law**
2018 farm bill **Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018** Covers 2019-2023 crops or until 9/30/2023	4/18/2018 H.R. 2 Vote of 26-20 5/3/2018 H.Rept. 115-661	5/18/2018 H.R. 2 Initial vote failed by 198-213 Reconsidered under H.Res. 905 6/21/2018 Passed by vote of 213-211	6/13/2018 S. 3042 Vote of 20-1	6/28/2018 H.R. 2 Vote of 86-11	12/10/2018 H.Rept. 115-1072	12/12/2018 H.R. 2 Vote of 369-47	12/11/2018 H.R. 2 Vote of 87-13	12/20/2018 P.L. 115-334
2014 farm bill **Agricultural Act of 2014** *(113th Congress)* Covers 2014-2018 crops or until 9/30/2018	5/15/2013 H.R. 1947 Vote of 36-10 5/29/2013 H.Rept. 113-92	6/20/2013 H.R. 1947 Failed by vote 195-234 7/11/2013 H.R. 2642 Farm portion vote of 216-208 9/19/2013 H.R. 3102 Nutrition part vote of 217-210 9/28/2013 H.Res. 361 combined House bills	5/14/2013 S. 954 Vote of 15-5 9/4/2013 S.Rept. 113-88	6/10/2013 S. 954 Vote of 66-27	1/27/2014 H.Rept. 113-333	1/29/2014 H.R. 2642 Vote of 251-166	2/4/2014 H.R. 2642 Vote of 68-32	2/7/2014 P.L. 113-79
Agriculture Reform, Food, and Jobs Act *(112th Congress)*	7/11/2012 H.R. 6083 Vote of 35-11 9/13/2012 H.Rept. 112-669	—	4/26/2012 S. 3240 Vote of 16-5 8/28/2012 S.Rept. 112-203	6/21/2012 S. 3240 Vote of 64-35	—	—	—	—
Early extension:	Extended five conservation programs of the 2008 farm bill through FY2014 (AMA, CSP, EQIP, FPP, and WHIP).							11/18/2011 P.L. 112-55
Extension:	One-year extension of the 2008 farm bill until 9/30/2013 and for the 2013 crop year (dairy price support extended until 12/31/2013, and MILC extended until 9/30/2013). Did not provide funding for programs without mandatory baseline.							1/2/2013 P.L. 112-240 Title VII

	House		Senate		Conference Report Approval			
	Cmte.	**Passage**	**Cmte.**	**Passage**	**Conf. Report**	**House Passage**	**Senate Passage**	**Public Law**
2008 farm bill **Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008** Covers 2008-2012 crops or until 9/30/2012	5/22/2007 H.R. 2419 Introduced 7/23/2007 H.Rept. 110-256	7/27/2007 H.R. 2419 Vote of 231-191	11/2/2007 S. 2302 S.Rept. 110-220	12/14/2007 Amdt. to H.R. 2419 Vote of 79-14	5/13/2008 H.Rept. 110-627	5/14/2008 H.R. 2419 Vote of 318-106	5/15/2008 H.R. 2419 Vote of 81-15	5/21/2008 Enrolling error omits Title III Vetoed
						5/21/2008 Passed over veto 316-108	5/22/2008 Passed over veto 82-13	5/22/2008 P.L. 110-234
					Re-passed as new bill w/Title III	5/22/2008 H.R. 6124 Vote of 306-110	6/5/2008 H.R. 6124 Vote of 77-15	6/18/2008 Vetoed
						6/18/2008 Passed over veto 317-109	6/18/2008 Passed over veto 80-14	6/18/2008 P.L. 110-246
Early extensions:	Extended the early-expiring MILC program of the 2002 farm bill for two years from 9/2005 through 8/2007 and two conservation programs (EQIP and Conservation Security Program) until FY2010.							2/8/2006 P.L. 109-171
Extensions:	Extended parts of the 2002 farm bill until 3/15/2008 but did not extend the direct and counter-cyclical farm commodity programs. See Division A, §751.							12/26/2007 P.L. 110-161
	Continued extension until 4/18/2008 and added extension of suspension of permanent law.							3/14/2008 P.L. 110-196
	Continued extension until 4/25/2008.							4/18/2008 P.L. 110-200
	Continued extension until 5/2/2008.							4/25/2008 P.L. 110-205
	Continued extension until 5/16/2008.							5/2/2008 P.L. 110-208
	Continued extension until 5/23/2008.							5/18/2008 P.L. 110-231
2002 farm bill **Farm Security and Rural Investment Act** Covers 2002-2007 crops or until 9/30/2007	7/26/2001 H.R. 2646 8/2/2001 H.Rept. 107-191	10/5/2001 H.R. 2646 Vote of 291-120	11/27/2001 S. 1731 12/7/2001 S.Rept. 107-117	2/13/2002 Amdt. to H.R. 2646 Vote of 58-40	5/1/2002 H.Rept. 107-424	5/2/2002 H.R. 2646 Vote of 280-141	5/8/2002 H.R. 2646 Vote of 64-35	5/13/2002 P.L. 107-171

	House		Senate		Conference Report Approval			
	Cmte.	**Passage**	**Cmte.**	**Passage**	**Conf. Report**	**House Passage**	**Senate Passage**	**Public Law**
1996 farm bill **Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996** Covers 1996-2002 crops or until 9/30/2002	1/5/1996 H.R. 2854 introduced Vote of 29-17 2/9/1996 H.Rept. 104-462	2/29/1996 H.R. 2854 Vote of 270-155	1/26/1996 S. 1541 introduced	2/7/1996 S. 1541 Vote of 64-32 3/12/1996 Amdt. to H.R. 2854 Voice vote	3/25/1996 H.Rept. 104-494	3/29/1996 H.R. 2854 Vote of 318-89	3/28/1996 H.R. 2854 Vote of 74-26	4/4/1996 P.L. 104-127
Balanced Budget Act of 1995	10/26/1995 H.R. 2491 includes H.R. 2195	10/26/1995 H.R. 2491 Vote of 227-203	10/28/1995 S. 1357 includes Senate bill	10/28/1995 Amdt. to H.R. 2491 Vote of 52-47	11/16/1995 H.Rept. 104-347	11/20/1995 H.R. 2491 Vote of 235-192	11/17/1995 H.R. 2491 Vote of 52-47	12/6/1995 Vetoed
Freedom to Farm Act	8/4/1995 H.R. 2195 introduced 9/20/1995 fails cmte.	—	9/28/1995 unnumber-ed bill	—	—	—	—	—
Extension:	More than a year before expiration, extended the dairy program of the 1990 farm bill until 1996 and extended programs for wheat, feed grains, cotton, rice, peanuts, wool, and mohair until 1997 and honey until 1998.							8/10/1993 P.L. 103-66
1990 farm bill **Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990** Covers 1991-1995 crops or until 9/30/1995	2/5/1990 H.R. 3950 introduced 7/3/1990 H.Rept. 101-569	8/1/1990 H.R. 3950 Vote of 327-91	7/6/1990 S. 2830 S.Rept. 101-357	7/27/1990 S. 2830 Vote of 70-21	10/22/1990 H.Rept. 101-916	10/23/1990 S. 2830 Vote of 318-102	10/25/1990 S. 2830 Vote of 60-36	11/28/1990 P.L. 101-624
1985 farm bill **Food Security Act of 1985** Covers 1986-1990 crops or until 9/30/1990	4/17/1985 H.R. 2100 introduced 9/13/1985 H.Rept. 99-271	10/8/1985 H.R. 2100 Vote of 282-141	9/30/1985 S. 1714 S.Rept. 99-145	11/23/1985 H.R. 2100 Vote of 61-28	12/17/1985 H.Rept. 99-447	12/18/1985 H.R. 2100 Vote of 325-96	12/18/1985 H.R. 2100 Vote of 55-38	12/23/1985 P.L. 99-198
1981 farm bill **Agriculture and Food Act of 1981** Covers 1982-1985 crops or until 9/30/1985	5/18/1981 H.R. 3603 introduced 5/19/1981 H.Rept. 97-106	10/22/1981 S. 884 Vote of 192-160	4/7/1981 S. 884 introduced 5/27/1981 S.Rept. 97-126	9/18/1981 S. 884 Vote of 49-32	12/9/1981 H.Rept. 97-377 12/10/1981 S.Rept. 97-290	12/16/1981 S. 884 Vote of 205-203	12/10/1981 S. 884 Vote of 67-32	12/22/1981 P.L. 97-98

	House		Senate		Conference Report Approval			
	Cmte.	**Passage**	**Cmte.**	**Passage**	**Conf. Report**	**House Passage**	**Senate Passage**	**Public Law**
1977 farm bill **Food and Agriculture Act of 1977** Covers 1978-1981 crops or until 9/30/1981	5/13/1977 H.R. 7171 introduced 5/16/1977 H.Rept. 95-348	7/28/1977 Amdt. to S. 275 Vote of 294-114	1/18/1977 S. 275 introduced 5/16/1977 S.Rept. 95-180	5/24/1977 S. 275 Vote of 69-18	9/9/1977 S.Rept. 95-418	9/16/1977 S. 275 Vote of 283-107	9/9/1977 S. 275 Vote of 63-8	9/29/1977 P.L. 95-113
1973 farm bill **Agriculture and Consumer Protection Act** Covers 1974-1977 crops or until 6/30/1977	6/20/1973 H.R. 8860 introduced 6/27/1973 H.Rept. 93-337	7/19/1973 Amdt. to S. 1888 Vote of 226-182	5/23/1973 S. 1888 introduced S.Rept. 93-173	6/8/1973 S. 1888 Vote of 78-9	7/31/1973 H.Rept. 93-427	8/3/1973 S. 1888 Vote of 252-151	7/31/1973 S. 1888 Vote of 85-7	8/10/1973 P.L. 93-86
1970 farm bill **Agricultural Act of 1970** Covers 1971-1973 crops	7/23/1970 H.R. 18546 H.Rept. 91-1329	8/5/1970 H.R. 18546 Vote of 212-171	9/4/1970 Amdt. to H.R. 18546 S.Rept. 91-1154	9/15/1970 Amdt. to H.R. 18546 Vote of 65-7	10/9/1970 H.Rept. 91-1594	10/13/1970 H.R. 18546 Vote of 191-145	11/19/1970 H.R. 18546 Vote of 48-35	11/30/1970 P.L. 91-524
Extension:	More than a year before expiration, extended the 1965 farm bill for one-year until 12/31/1970.							10/11/1968 P.L. 90-559
1965 farm bill **Food and Agricultural Act** Covers 1966-1969 crops	7/20/1965 H.R. 9811 H.Rept. 89-631	8/19/1965 H.R. 9811 Vote of 221-172	9/7/1965 Amdt. to H.R. 9811 S.Rept. 89-687	9/14/1965 Amdt. to H.R. 9811 Vote of 72-22	10/6/1965 H.Rept. 89-1123	10/8/1965 H.R. 9811 Vote of 219-150	10/12/1965 H.R. 9811 Voice vote	11/4/1965 P.L. 89-321

Source: CRS, using http://www.congress.gov. Includes only major legislative actions. Excludes subsequent revisions, such as in budget reconciliation, except for extensions as noted.

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