

Legislative Outlook for the 115th Congress

Article By:

Natasha Eckard Hammond

On Tuesday, January 31, the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee – led by Chairman Pat Roberts (R-KS) and Ranking Member Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) – held a brief business meeting to adopt the committee’s rules and funding resolution for the 115th Congress. Chairman Roberts announced that a separate meeting would be held to approve subcommittee assignments.

Similarly, on Wednesday, February 1, the House Agriculture Committee held a formal business meeting to organize for the 115th Congress. After a fairly emotional recognition and sendoff of his “right hand guy,” former committee staff director Scott Graves, House Agriculture Committee Chairman Mike Conaway (R-TX) kicked off the business meeting with opening remarks that focused on his desire to work in a bipartisan fashion to enact sound food and farm policies during the 115th Congress. Ranking Member Collin Peterson (D-MN) also offered introductory remarks, echoing Chairman Conaway’s sentiments for the committee to work in a bipartisan manner. Following the remarks, committee leaders quickly adopted the committee’s rules, oversight plan, and staff list for the 115th Congress.

Between President Donald Trump’s ambitious agenda on several items of great importance to the agricultural community – namely trade, immigration, and regulatory reform – and the expiration of the 2014 Farm Bill during the 115th Congress, the leaders of the House and Senate Agriculture Committees will no doubt have their work cut out for them over the next two years. The “big four” do, at least, have one thing going for them: experience. They each have extensive experience working on agriculture issues, but they also have experience working with each other, as they each hold the same leadership position on their respective committees in the 115th Congress as they held in the 114th Congress. However, it is no secret that being at the helm of an agriculture committee during the debate, passage, and eventual enactment, of a farm bill is not an easy task. In fact, many agriculture committee members and others in the agricultural community were skeptical that a compromise could ever be reached over the tumultuous two-and-a-half years House and Senate agriculture committee members, as well as House and Senate leadership, worked to advance the 2014 Farm Bill.

Although progress on the 2014 Farm Bill seemed to be as cyclical as overall farm returns over the same time period, an agreement was eventually reached. Tomorrow, February 7, 2017, marks the three-year anniversary of the bill’s enactment into law. As the bill expires in September 2018, lawmakers familiar with how it last played out understand the heavy lift they have agreed to undertake in reauthorizing federal nutrition and farm policies for the next five to six years. As daunting

as it may seem to the agricultural community as a whole, the “big four” have publicly shown a sense of dedication and willingness to work together to enact sound farm and nutrition policies. However, they also have publicly recognized that agreements on policies associated with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly the Food Stamp Program, may not come easy. Considering SNAP consumes approximately 80 percent of total farm bill costs, it seems safe to say that, similar to last time, it has the potential to “make or break” negotiations.

Aside from nutrition, differences in opinions are to be expected on other major farm bill policies, including the structure of commodity programs, reforms sought to crop insurance policies, and modifications to conservation programs.

© Copyright 2025 Squire Patton Boggs (US) LLP

National Law Review, Volume VII, Number 38

Source URL: <https://natlawreview.com/article/legislative-outlook-115th-congress>