

This Farm Bill Action Alert contains:

- the alert from ADA President Connie B. Diekman
- the brief message to senators
- instructions for sending message to senators via Grassroots Manager at ADA's website
- background info on latest senate Farm Bill discussion from On the Pulse

The following items are also attached to help you take action:

- letter templates to customize and fax or email to our senators (if you choose not to use the Grassroots Manager to deliver your message) or use as script for phone call to our senators' offices. Their phone and fax numbers are included.

ADA MEMBER ACTION ALERT

October 29, 2007

ACTION ALERT SENATE FARM BILL

To members of the American Dietetic Association from ADA President Connie B. Diekman, MEd, RD, LD, FADA:

This week or early next week, the full Senate will debate the Farm Bill measure reported from the Senate Agriculture Committee. As an ADA member, you have unique knowledge and experience about the value of strong food and nutrition programs.

As a registered dietitian, I am proud of the American Dietetic Association's work on the 2007 Farm Bill. Thousands of our members asked us to be active in seeking a Farm Bill that not only provides a safety net for farmers, but also assists the hungry in our midst. You wanted ADA to speak for a Farm Bill making tangible progress to improve people's nutritional health, fund new food and agricultural research, pay greater attention to food safety and inspection and remove features of current farm programs that unduly influence or actually limit what farmers can and cannot grow and market.

ADA members have made a difference in the quality of the 2007 debate, so the Farm Bill going to the full Senate soon begins to address your priorities. This measure only goes part of the way, however; we need your help to convey that new authorities get the necessary funding so all Americans can live in a food and nutrition environment more conducive to their health.

Please contact your Senators and ask them to ensure that the Senate's 2007 Farm Bill delivers tangible benefits to all Americans. Ask your Senators to support:

*** Inclusion of nutrition standards for competitive foods sold in schools.**

* The committee's nutrition title that both strengthens the food assistance programs and makes nutrition a priority in federal programs.

* Floor amendments that achieve a better balance in farm and food policy.

To send a message to your Senators, go to:

<http://www.eatright.org> and log in as a member.

* Under the Advocacy and the Profession tab click "Grassroots Manager" on the left-hand side.

* Once in "Grassroots Manager," click "Take Action."

* Then click on the Farm Bill for Senators tab. From there you will be told how to send the message to your two Senators.

This interactive page will translate your ADA member number into a personalized letter from you to your Senators. You have a choice whether you e-mail your Senator directly or print out a letter to fax. In this case, please choose to e-mail your note.

BACKGROUND INFO AS OF OCTOBER 26, 2007 (FROM ADA'S ON THE PULSE)

Senate committee moves farm bill

The Senate Agriculture Committee unanimously has supported a farm bill that would extend most crop subsidies, boost some conservation payments, create a new program to aid expansion of biofuels, and increase investments in nutrition and food assistance programs. The committee made few changes to the framework developed by Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Sens. Kent Conrad (D-ND) and Saxby Chambliss (R-GA) but several members pledged to offer amendments on the floor that would limit farm subsidies and direct money to other programs like conservation and food stamp benefits.

Harkin hailed the Food and Energy Security Act as "a farm bill that is good for agriculture, good for rural areas and good for the health of Americans." While the bill did not reach the earlier goals of reform advocated by Harkin, it is a "forward-looking farm bill with greatly strengthened initiatives" to support agricultural producers, conservation initiatives, rural development and "promote better diets and health for all Americans."

Harkin has long been an advocate of strong nutrition programs and those priorities were reflected in the Nutrition Title of the bill. The bill boosts funding for numerous nutrition initiatives and calls for strengthening the provision of nutritious foods in food assistance programs, including:

- Funding pilot projects in the food stamp program to help low-income Americans make nutritious choices, including \$25 million for a pilot providing point of purchase incentives to encourage participants to buy healthy foods, one of ADA's farm bill recommendations.
- Requiring U.S. Department of Agriculture to study how foods are chosen for the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations and identify what steps should be taken to bring the food package in line with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*.
- Expanding the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program to all 50 states and the District of Columbia, focusing the program on low-income elementary schools. The bill requires USDA to conduct an evaluation of the program, including impact on fruit and vegetable consumption and other dietary changes.

Food assistance programs were also strengthened, with increased funding for the Emergency Food Assistance Program and increases in the minimum benefit for the food stamp program and indexing of standard deduction and asset limits to inflation. These measures are expected to increase the purchasing power of food stamp recipients. The bill authorizes a new program at USDA to develop and conduct a study analyzing hunger in the U.S. and making recommendations to reduce domestic hunger and authorizes grants to reduce hunger.

Numerous other provisions advocated for by the public health community and ADA were included, such as allowing schools to use geographic preference to procure locally produced foods and strengthening the Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs. Last minute efforts to include nutrition standards for competitive foods sold in schools were delayed. Efforts to update and expand school nutrition standards continue, with possible action when the farm bill goes to the Senate floor.

The Research Title fell short of ADA's call for \$1 billion in new investments in food and agriculture research. The bill includes establishment of a National Institute of Food and Agriculture by transferring USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service but does not include mandatory funds for the Institute. The title establishes a possible framework for future growth and includes "food, nutrition, and human health" in the definition of fundamental research. The bill also reauthorizes joint USDA and Department of Health and Human Services nutrition monitoring activities, a long standing priority of ADA.

In other areas of the farm bill, the committee extended most crop subsidy provisions of the 2002 bill but included a new option beginning with the 2010 crop year that would allow producers to participate in a state-level revenue protection system referred to as the "average crop revenue" program. Much of the funds to pay for increases in nutrition and other programs come from the savings anticipated from this program. The bill attempts to cut off subsidies for wealthy landowners who make most of their income from outside the farm, although some senators have criticized the \$750,000 adjusted gross income cut-off point is too high.

The conservation title extends current conservation programs and increases funding for the Conservation Stewardship Program and the energy title includes numerous provisions to support biofuels and renewable energy.

There were two amendments that garnered the most debate during committee discussions. One was an amendment from Sen. Pat Roberts (R-KS) that altered some provisions in Harkin's "average crop revenue" program that would give farmers the choice of replacing traditional crop subsidies with a payment linked to state revenue targets. After negotiations with Harkin, that amendment was adopted.

An amendment offered by Sen. Richard Lugar (R-IN) that would increase food assistance spending by almost \$1.6 billion over five years caused palpable unease among the committee. Committee members did not object to the value of providing funds to raise food stamp asset limits and minimum benefits and boosting funding for the Emergency Food Assistance Program. What they did object to was the funding source -- cutting direct payments to farmers. Lugar knew the amendment would fail, but told the committee members he wanted them to vote on the record that they supported continuing direct payments to a small number of farmers over helping food-stamp recipients and people who rely on soup kitchens. "At some point you have to make a choice," Lugar said. "I would say this is a choice I would make." Though most committee members spoke in favor of the nutrition increases, they were not willing to reduce the direct payments and the amendment failed by a vote of 17-4.

Lugar is expected to pursue similar attempts at reform during floor deliberation of the farm bill. This week, he introduced the Farm, Ranch, Equity, Stewardship and Health (FRESH) Act, S. 2228. Lugar's bill would end federal crops subsidies and replace them with an insurance program available to all American farmers. The savings generated would be invested in hunger and environmental and conservation programs.

The full Senate is expected to consider the bill late next week (week Oct 29 - Nov 2).