

The U.S. Farm Bill is expected to land quick approval in the Senate, following an announcement by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid that the bill would take a top priority spot for the new session. 

The House of Representatives, however, could delay resolution once again, said Roger Johnson, president of the National Farmers Union.

"There is no question the Senate is ready to move and that they can move fairly quickly and that they will pass the bill fairly quickly and it will be a bipartisan vote. I don't think there is much doubt about all of that. It is the House where you have the dysfunction that has occurred. That was the hold up last time and it seems likely, at least temporarily, to be the hold up this time as well," Johnson told [www.freshfruitportal.com](http://www.freshfruitportal.com).

"The House is a different matter and a lot of folks are waiting from a signal from Speaker Boehner that he will allow a bill to come to the floor. That was the problem last year."

Regarding Sen. Reid's support, American Farm Bureau president Bob Stallman told the *Wisconsin State Farmer* that he was pleased the Senate would be giving its version of the bill another try.

"We are also encouraged to hear that Sen. Reid is making the farm bill one of several privileged, top priority legislative actions this year," Stallman said in the *Wisconsin State Farmer*.

"This represents real hope for farmers and ranchers that the Senate, like last session, will aggressively move forward on a long-term farm bill to give farmers the risk-management certainty we need."

He was confident the House Agriculture Committee would draft a compatible bill.

### **Budget pressure**

Another major challenge as the bill proceeds will be pressure for greater fiscal cuts, explained Pat Westhoff, director of the Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute at the University of Missouri.

"There's a very good chance there could be changes in this legislation long before we get to September," Pat Westhoff told the *National Hog Farmer*.

"Not because we'll necessarily pass a new five-year farm bill right away, but because

upcoming negotiations on fiscal issues may cause us to make further cuts in programs to try to meet budgetary targets. That can mean changes in farm bill provisions even for the crop we harvest this fall.”

The Congressional Budget Office released its initial budget projections for 2014 on Tuesday, providing clues to what the final funding for the bill will look like.

The snapshot, preceding the final budget in March, outlines possible cuts and increases across the bill, currently waiting definitive action by Congress.

The hotly contested Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is expected to decrease in cost by almost US\$8 billion over five years and by nearly US\$12 billion over the next decade, according to analysis by the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition.

The crop insurance program is expected to decline by US\$3 billion over the next decade compared to last year's estimates. Assuming reasonable conditions, it should cost around US\$9 billion a year.

Commodity programs, in contrast, are expected to increase in cost by about US\$1.6 billion over the decade. The coalition attributed the increase to an expected rise in Average Crop Revenue Election (ACRE) payments for corn, soybeans, wheat and cotton.

The budget analysis assumes no changes to the current law, which was extended until Sept. 30 after Congress failed to conclude voting in the previous session.

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