

Senate Agriculture Committee passes farm bill that contains Pingree local food provisions

Bill would make crop insurance available to smaller, diversified farmers

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For immediate release

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The Senate Agriculture Committee passed a farm bill late last week that contained a number of provisions to support local and organic farms. All of those provisions were included in the Local Farms, Food and Jobs Act, introduced by Pingree earlier this year.

“I was glad to see that this bill adopts some key programs that will support smaller farmers and organic farmers and make it easier for consumers to have access to local food,” Pingree, a member of the House Agriculture Committee said today. “Local food is good for the economy and good for families. Consumers want access to local food and it’s time our agriculture policy start catching up with that.”

Among the provisions from Pingree’s bill included in the Senate bill were:

- Whole farm insurance that allow diversified farms—farms that grow a variety of crops—to access crop insurance programs. Currently crop insurance is only available to farmers who grow commodity crops like corn or soybeans.
- An improved farmers market promotion program that provides grants for marketing assistance to a variety of local food entities like roadside farm stands and farmers markets.
- A pilot program to allow farmers markets to use smartphones to read EBT cards so consumers who use food stamp benefits have better access to local food.
- An organic cost share program that provides money to help farmers make the shift from conventional to organic farming.
- Requires the USDA to study the economy of local foods and report back to Congress, to make it easier to track the economic benefits of local food systems.

Pingree said while the bill does provide support for local food, it doesn’t go far enough.

“This is a first step and we have a long way to go still. I was disappointed the Committee didn’t include the no-cost common sense farm to school programs contained in the Local Farms, Food and Jobs Act. And while I’m pleased that the bill includes elimination

of direct automatic subsidy payments it doesn't go far enough in reforming the current crop insurance program," Pingree said.

The full Senate will likely vote on the Farm Bill later this spring and the House is expected to take up a bill this summer. The Farm Bill is passed every five years and sets the nation's agriculture policy—the current bill expires September 30.