

## *AgriTalk*

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Mike Adams with House Ag. Comm. Ranking Member Collin Peterson (D., Minn.)

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Note: This is an **unofficial** transcript of an *AgriTalk* interview.



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**Mr. Mike Adams:** And joining us now with perspective from the House side, we're always happy to talk with the Ranking Member of the House Ag Committee, Collin Peterson. Congressman, thanks for joining us.

**Rep. Collin Peterson:** Good morning, how are you doing?

**Mr. Adams:** Very good. What are your thoughts as you watch what's going on over on the Senate?

**Rep. Peterson:** Well, it's the Senate, you know. They've got people there that, you know, don't – it's the whole problem in Washington – people that just want to pick fights, real or imagined, and don't really want to get anything done.

But I'm very optimistic about this. I think things are going to hold together. I think they're going to pare those amendments down to what's real and get them to a manageable level. I'm very optimistic. I think the Senate's going to get this done.

We're going to get it out of the House committee, and we'll have a tough fight on the floor, but we all are determined to get this done. We're working together, Frank Lucas and I. There's no daylight between us. We're in lockstep. And everybody wants to get this done, and I think we will.

But there are people out there trying to derail it, like they do everything else in Washington. But I think they're going to fail, and I think we're going to get this done.

**Mr. Adams:** Let's talk about some of the individual battles taking place, one of them being over crop insurance. What do you think will happen there? What are your feelings about the attempts to put caps on crop insurance?

**Rep. Peterson:** I think it's not a good idea. I think it would hugely complicate the whole system, and probably diminish the use of crop insurance, which will increase pressure for ad hoc disaster and so forth. But we've made a lot of progress with crop insurance in terms of getting...you know, in my part of the world, just about everybody's on the system.

And we've made a lot of changes in crop insurance the last, since the '08 bill, and we have not been given hard data yet on what those changes actually did, and so I don't think we should be making any changes in crop insurance until we get hard data back on what happened with the SRA, what happened with the re-rating and so forth.

So there will be attempts, but I think we'll be able to defeat those attempts to muck up the crop insurance system. They just shifted that fight we always had over direct payments, now they've shifted it over to crop insurance. It's the same folks that...I don't know what their agenda is, exactly, but they're bound and determined to try to raise the price of food in this country. It seems like that's the only thing they're trying to accomplish.

**Mr. Adams:** What about dairy reform, which you're very much involved in? Do you think we'll see major dairy policy reform in this new farm bill?

**Rep. Peterson:** Oh, yeah, yeah. The Dairy Security Act was added in the Senate. I think we have about 90% support, which is the best you're ever going to get in dairy. And we have to change this. The current system just does not work. We can't afford to get into another situation like we did in '09, and we've got to give dairy farmers a way to manage their risk, and that's what this does.

It also moved the dairy program more in a market-oriented direction, simplifies things. It's going to help us compete in the export market. You know, it's not perfect, but the current system is just not adequate, and we have to do this, so it'll be part of the final farm bill, and it should be.

**Mr. Adams:** We're talking with the Ranking Member of the House Ag Committee, Congressman Collin Peterson. What about the battle over nutrition programs, food stamps and all the aspects of nutrition programs, school lunch programs, things like that? Some want more money for it, some want cuts. What do you think will happen?

**Rep. Peterson:** Well, we'll do something in the middle. There's going to be more cuts in the House bill. And I've been working with the Republicans on this, and I'm going to support those higher cuts. They're really not cuts. What they are is there were additional eligibility things that were put into the stimulus bill and so forth which I think are being abused by certain states.

We have 14 states that are using this LIHEAP deal, the Low Income Heating Assistance Program, to qualify people that would not necessarily qualify under the regular food stamp program. Fourteen states are paying people one dollar under the

LIHEAP program to qualify them, which is getting around the intent of the law. So just that change alone is \$12 billion, according to CBO, over ten years.

So we're going to come in with a higher number. The Senate will probably stay with the four billion, we'll probably be at 15, and we'll probably end up with nine at the end of the day.

**Mr. Adams:** Well, let's talk about budget savings. What kind of a number will you have to be at on the House side to get a bill passed in the House?

**Rep. Peterson:** Well, I'm hearing 35 billion – 34, 35 billion is what the leadership in the House is asking for. And Frank Lucas and I have pretty well got this worked out. We're still waiting on a couple scores, but in the big picture, we've agreed on things, and I'm going to support a bill that cuts 35 billion. And we'll be able to work this out.

We just...frankly, there aren't going to be a lot of things to cut to conference once we get this through the floor. You know, the commodity title's going to have differences, and food stamps are going to have differences, and that's going to be about it, so we could conference this in pretty short order. And if we don't get any glitches, we could actually get this done by the August recess.

But I think we'll clearly get it into conference by then, and if we can do that, we can conference it over the August recess and get it on the floor in September, and we'll be able to pass it once it's in... Once it's in conference report, it doesn't take a lot of floor time, and at that point, generally, it'll sail through. So I'm pretty optimistic that we're going to get this done.

**Mr. Adams:** So you do not expect a contentious conferencing on the two bills then?

**Rep. Peterson:** Well, you know, it'll be...there are differences there. The Senate took out the target price component. I think it's pretty clear the House will have and will continue the target price countercyclical program. So I imagine we're going to end up where the super committee was, where people are going to have a choice between the revenue program and the target price program, and we just have to work out the details. In the food stamp area, my guess is we'll compromise in the middle on that.

So I don't think it's rocket science. It'll be contentious. People have strong feelings about things. But we have demonstrated that we know how to work together, we know how to legislate, we know how to compromise, and that's what needs to be done. And as long as everybody's in that mode, we'll make it happen, I think.

**Mr. Adams:** We had heard early on that maybe Speaker Boehner didn't want to bring the farm bill up for a vote in the House until after the November elections. Is that true or have you heard any assurances from him that he will bring a bill up for a vote before then?

**Rep. Peterson:** Well, we haven't got a definite answer. I talked to one of his top aides the other day. Really what John was saying was that...he didn't say he didn't want to bring it up. What he said was he didn't think the Senate would be able to pass a bill, and so therefore he wasn't even going to think about it, because he thought there was no chance the Senate would get a bill done.

In talking to one of his top aides, he confirmed with me that if the Senate gets the bill out on a bipartisan basis, if the House committee passes the bill out with 35 billion in cuts on a bipartisan basis, then that changes the entire conversation. At that point, I don't think there's any way that they can hold this off the floor. I mean, they're not going to have any kind of good excuse to do that, you know, so...

I don't think John has said that he wants to do it after November. I think all he was saying throughout this process was he hasn't got a lot of confidence the Senate can get anything done, and so he just didn't think it was going to happen.

**Mr. Adams:** You sound pretty confident that we'll have a farm bill done by September 30<sup>th</sup>.

**Rep. Peterson:** Yep, I am pretty confident. I think Debbie Stabenow has done an outstanding job over in the Senate, and Pat Roberts as well. They're working together. They are determined to get this done. The leadership over there, Senator Reid is doing everything he can to make this thing happen. Over on our side, Frank and I are working together, and we think we've made a lot of progress with our committee members, and we'll have a strong bipartisan vote for our bill.

So this thing, you know, needs to get done, because if we wait and get in the quagmire after the election with this lame duck and all these expiring tax cuts and everything else, budget deficit and sequestration, you know, that is not any kind of good scenario. We all understand that. That's why we're determined to make this happen. And when you get everybody on all sides of this determined to make something happen, you can make it happen.

We got all the farm groups want to get this done, the conservation groups want to get this done, the nutrition people want to get this done, rural development, the dairy people. I mean, I've never seen everybody lining up that's affected by the farm bill with the same message, and that is get this thing done. And that has an effect on congressmen and senators, you know. So I think this thing is on track. I'm going to do everything I can to make this happen.

We'll end up with a bill that I'm not going to be totally happy with, Frank won't be totally happy with, the Senate won't be totally happy with, but that's how things work.

**Mr. Adams:** All right, Congressman, thanks a lot. We'll be watching and talk to you again soon.

**Rep. Peterson:** All right, very good. Thank you.

**Mr. Adams:** Collin Peterson, Ranking Member of the House Ag Committee on AgriTalk.

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