

*The Oklahoma Farm Report- Radio Oklahoma Network*

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Ron Hays with House Ag. Comm. Chairman Frank Lucas (R., Okla.)

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**Mr. Ron Hays:** Talking now with Third District Congressman Frank Lucas, of course Chair of the House Ag Committee. Mr. Lucas, when we think about where we are right now, the latest effort by the Democrats on the Senate side talking about this alternative sequester deal, basically eliminating direct farm program payments for a ten-year period, I know that you were not pleased when that word came out.

**Rep. Frank Lucas:** Oh, absolutely not. We all agree sequester needs to be better targeted. We all agree that the impacts on the Department of Defense and a number of other areas are unacceptable. But, unlike the House proposal of cutting spending across the board in a variety of places and reallocating, what the Senate's talking about is a combination of half the money coming from new tax increases and the other half being a reallocation of cuts within the Department of Defense, and, oh, by the way, take the direct payments. That's the resource base we need to use to craft the next farm bill in 2013. Literally, if the Senate gets their way, I don't know what we have left to write a farm bill with this summer.

**Mr. Hays:** Well, Ms. Stabenow seemed to be pretty adamant that she thought there was no use to the direct payments, let's get rid of them.

**Rep. Lucas:** Well, my colleague and Chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee has to work within that environment over there, and clearly the pressure is on from the leadership of the United States Senate—majority leadership—to make something happen. But I would tell you, you've got to have something to work with to craft the next farm bill. And while we all know direct payments won't be a part of the next equation, you still have to have something to plus up the insurance side. You still have to have something to address all the other issues.

I don't know how we write a farm bill if the Senate proposal were to become law. But the House will not accept Senate language that has tax increases. We say the problem is not that the federal government doesn't tax enough, which is what the

President and Harry Reid say, we say, quite simply, we spend too much, and we've got to reduce spending. That's how we fix the problem in the big picture sense.

**Mr. Hays:** Extension right now, as we speak, the next time the government opens, we'll be signing up for the one-year extension, putting it now in June. You thought that was pretty important we get that going as quickly as possible.

**Rep. Lucas:** Absolutely. In this one-year extension of the farm bill, literally in the sixth year of the farm bill, as in previous farm bills, the direct payment is the primary safety net. Producers need to go down and sign up as soon as it's available, which is just in a matter of days. They need to sign up and tie that down as quickly as they can. Not everybody in D.C. wants us to have a safety net for the rest of this crop year. We need to get signed up.

**Mr. Hays:** I guess if a guy signs up, that gives him a contract with the government. Does that give him a little more assurance?

**Rep. Lucas:** Everything is subject to OMB's interpretation, Office of Management & Budget, OMB, and also to the department. But I don't see how, when you've got a signed contract and the resources are committed, I don't see how they renege on that. Even being subject to sequestration, we're talking about so many percents. The body of the direct payment as promised will still be there. You need to sign up. You need to tie down that commitment.

**Mr. Hays:** Regarding the pot of money known as crop insurance, do you see some long knives coming after that yet?

**Rep. Lucas:** The moment that it became obvious that direct payments would not be a part of the next farm bill, the bean counters, the budget choppers, those people who don't want to spend any money on rural America, who don't understand where their food comes from, have started targeting crop insurance.

But remember, we've already seen, in the '08 Farm Bill, reductions made in the crop insurance spending. We also already saw the administration, in their first four years, in the SRA [Standard Reinsurance Agreement], turn down the money for crop insurance, so they've already taken two bites from it. I'm committed to hold the line because with direct payments gone, crop insurance and whatever we do with shallow loss, whatever we do with potential for price protection becomes your safety net. I want a safety net. Mother Nature's demonstrated you need a safety net.

**Mr. Hays:** How likely are we to get a five-year farm bill this year?

**Rep. Lucas:** In my conversation with the Speaker of the United States House, he understands, I believe, that a one-year extension was all the extensions we'll do. We have to do the bill. Just as last summer, when the committee finished its work, I was ready to go to the floor. I've got a few new faces, and there's some new members of the United States House, but let's do our work. As soon as we settle some of the dust around sequestration and the next budget act, and the next CR, and the next debt

ceiling issue, let's get some certainty to the numbers, but let's do our work, let's go to the floor, and let's get on to conference and finish the product.

**Mr. Hays:** I guess what that means, we're still a couple months away before you can start writing.

**Rep. Lucas:** Easily. I don't see how you can begin to do anything before sometime in May. And even at that point, you've got to let the smoke settle. See, that was part of the problem in the last effort at doing a farm bill. The House was targeting \$35 billion in savings, the Senate was targeting 23. Even if we'd gotten to conference, there was a lot of comparing apples and oranges there.

**Mr. Hays:** Regarding the overall makeup of Congress this year, you said you've got a lot of new faces. How much education have you got to do to get them understanding?

**Rep. Lucas:** I don't have as many new faces as I had two years ago. We'll probably use the subcommittee process this time to bring members up to speed between now and the time we start the farm bill markup. And there will be full committee hearings, of course. But to get everybody up to speed, it's not as daunting a task as last time. When half the committee had never been in the room before, that was daunting. This time, yeah, we've got some new faces, but it's a more typical number as far as new faces.

**Mr. Hays:** Bottom line, are you feeling fairly hopeful that we will get something done here in 2013?

**Rep. Lucas:** I am optimistic that we will have a 2013 farm bill. I just don't know how much money will be available to us. I just don't know what day it gets signed. And oh, as I said a year ago, too, it would have been nice to have had this bill on the President's desk when he was running for reelection. Now that he'll never be on the ballot again, that might affect the White House's way of looking at things. I hope not.

*[End of recording.]*