

C-SPAN – Newsmakers

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Senate Ag Committee Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow (D., Mich.)

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Keith Good
FarmPolicy.com, Inc.
Champaign, IL
www.FarmPolicy.com

Mr. Peter Slen: Well, after several years of wrangling, the House has passed a five-year farm bill. Now it's up to the Senate. That'll be happening this week. Joining us on our *Newsmakers* program, Senator Debbie Stabenow, who is the chair of the Agriculture Committee. For our press panelists, Ed O'Keefe is with the Washington Post and Alan Bjerga is with Bloomberg. Mr. Bjerga, if you'd start the questioning.

Mr. Alan Bjerga: Senator, you seemed poised to see the passage through Congress of, really, what has been a dominant piece of work for you for the past several years, a new five-year farm bill. This was a tough slog this time. There was a rejection in the House of Representatives last year, a lot of negotiations back and forth, and it seems like with each of these farm bills that get passed there's a bigger chorus of people who may say that farm subsidies are too generous, or this time you've faced a lot of criticism on the food stamp program. Given the difficulty of this passing every time, is this the last farm bill you see being passed this way? Or was the split in the House last year a foretaste of farm bills to come?

Sen. Stabenow: Well, Alan, first of all, I hope it's not the last farm bill because we all have a stake in having affordable, safe food, and we in America are blessed that there's a group of people that are willing to get up every day and fight the weather. You know, nobody else, in their business, has to worry about if it's going to rain today, or if we're going to have a drought, as to whether or not they're going to be wiped out. And so we have a joint stake, both families, farmers, consumers, in having an American agricultural and food supply policy, and that's what this is.

What I am very proud of is that this really is a farm bill for the future, not the past. You know, for decades we've been talking about the fact we shouldn't be giving farm subsidies to farmers when prices are high, you shouldn't just get a check just because you plant something. In this farm bill, that's gone. Instead farmers are

going to get a bill for crop insurance instead of a check, or they are going to get help only when there's a weather disaster or when there's a market disaster.

And so if they have a disaster—and we don't want any farmers losing the farm for three or four days of bad weather—they'll be able to get help. And just like any other insurance, it'll cover 65, 70% of their loss, they'll cover the rest of it. And most of the time farmers will be paying thousands of dollars in crop insurance and get nothing in an individual year, so this is different.

The other thing I'm very proud of, as somebody who represents a state that grows a lot of fruits and vegetables, we have a very rigorous new fruit and vegetable effort on research and to support more growers. We have four times more money in farmers markets than we've ever invested before, the strongest efforts on organics, which are very much a part of the future, and for communities where we have lots of small farmers and they want to band together to sell locally to restaurants, or hospitals or schools, we create new local food hubs.

So there are many, many things in here that begin to change the paradigm, support traditional agriculture in a way that supports risk management, but does it in a way that's good for taxpayers and good for families, but then let's move to these other opportunities with small farms, other kinds of things that will allow us to promote the healthy fruits and vegetables that we all need to be eating, and all of the other farmers in the country.

Mr. Ed O'Keefe: There are so many different things packed in the 959 page piece of legislation, and we want to ask you about a few of them, but we'd be remiss not to first, before we forget, ask you a little bit about the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, what most Americans know as food stamps. It usually constitutes about 80% of the cost of the overall bill. Can you explain to viewers how exactly these cuts are being made? It's one of the leading things coming out of this bill, making about \$8 billion in cuts to food stamps. How is that being done, and what kind of people are going to be affected by that cut?

Sen. Stabenow: Absolutely. Well, Ed, first of all let me say that I've said I've been willing to attack waste, fraud and abuse. Any misuse in the system we'll tighten up, even though this is a very tight system already, very low error rate. Anything in that area I'm willing to do. But I'm not willing to change eligibility or to hurt people that really need food help.

I've got a lot of people in Michigan who lost their jobs through no fault of their own, paid taxes all their lives, are mortified that they need any kind of help. It's temporary help. The average person going on food assistance is for ten months or less. And there's no way in the world I would do anything that would hurt them. The House originally, as you know, passed policies that would have literally eliminated millions of people from getting help, people just like the people in Michigan. I said no to that.

But there is an area where, for well-meaning purposes, we've had a few states wanting to help people get more food assistance where they have stretched something, where we allowed LIHEAP heating assistance to be tied to food assistance. And a few states have allowed people without a utility bill to be able to get credit for having a utility bill that bumps up the amount of money they get. And they've done this by giving people one dollar in LIHEAP help every year, which technically means they get heating assistance, and they've done it. They've been able to get extra help even when they don't have a utility bill.

Now I want to get these people extra help. I wish we could have actually done more in the farm bill to actually increase that help. Not humanly possible, given the House of Representatives. But we only made one change in this whole thing. We didn't do anything in the bad policies that the House of Representatives had passed. We did one thing. We said if you have \$20 or more in heating help a year, nothing changes for you, you automatically get this heating deduction. If you have less than \$20 a year that you're receiving, then you have to produce a utility bill to get a utility credit.

Now I know that there are folks that are renters that don't have readily available the ability to show that they have utilities built into their rent. The Secretary of Agriculture has made a commitment to a very aggressive outreach program, which we will do, to help people be able to show and verify that they have their heat as part of their rent. But I can't, with a straight face, look at anybody and say it's okay for somebody to get a utility credit if they don't have a utility bill, so that's the change we made.

And then I will add one other thing, and that is when we did the dairy reform, one of the great things that we did is say the USDA can now buy milk for programs for children, for the needy, for food banks and so on. We have increased the money to food banks and we have said if you buy fresh fruits and vegetables with your food assistance money, we'll give you double the value of the food assistance, because we want people to be able to buy healthy food for their families. So that's just some of what we have done to support families.

Mr. O'Keefe: And you agree with the estimates that those changes in LIHEAP, the Low Income Heating Assistance Program, would affect about 800 to 900,000 households, roughly?

Sen. Stabenow: What they have said is that's the maximum, and if we are able to address renters then I expect that to be less.

Mr. O'Keefe: Taxpayer watchdog groups spend days diving into this type of legislation looking for all sorts of red flags. They didn't find too many, but one of the ones they found this week, and they're a little concerned about, and maybe you can help us understand, is apparently there was a provision in there that would have required a disclosure of lawmakers and cabinet secretaries and other senior government

officials who receive farm subsidies. At the last second apparently that was removed from the bill. Do you have any sense of why that was done?

Sen. Stabenow: Well, first of all it wasn't, quote, "removed from the bill." It wasn't in the Senate bill, it was in the House bill. And the decision was made that we already have financial disclosure forms as to where we get our income. This is done through other committees. We have an Ethics Committee, we have a Rules Committee. This is beyond our jurisdiction, so we indicated that if there's more that needs to be done there, then that should be done over there. I certainly would support that. But we already have to disclose where our income comes from, as do cabinet officials and anyone being nominated.

Mr. O'Keefe: But just to clarify real quick. On your disclosures currently, do you have to disclose that you receive farm subsidy?

Sen. Stabenow: You have to disclose your income and where it comes from.

Mr. O'Keefe: Okay, so therefore it would be on there. Great.

Mr. Bjerga: Although the detail would be very different between what has been reported in farm subsidies versus what would be on the financial disclosure forms. I mean, we've gone through these forms and you will have a question of was your income between, say, one and \$50,000. It's not particularly succinct. Whereas now you have very specific information on what farm subsidy program you receive from, what sorts of payments they are, what commodities they're for. It seems to be a stepping back from transparency. And I'd like to follow this issue up a little bit further.

Sen. Stabenow: And if I—let me just stop and say, though, this is not...[wasn't] in the House version, isn't traditionally a part of the farm bill. It's certainly something I would support doing more on, but it was not something that was done in this bill.

Mr. Bjerga: Sure, sure, understood. But there is seemingly a larger issue here that you'll hear echoed in other debates on farm subsidies, voices inside agriculture versus outside of agriculture. I mean, look, having farm subsidies reported by a farmer is not particularly popular with farmers. Nobody likes to have their income put into a database that people can search. But it is taxpayer money.

You also see efforts in terms of what happened on subsidy limits in the farm bill that was passed. The House and Senate had lower subsidy caps than what came out in the final agreement. When you take a look at some of these issues that go on financially, especially in a time when farm income is at a record, and you have watchdog groups saying why are these subsidies going to these people, and why can't we track these taxpayer dollars for something like crop insurance, how do you respond to that?

Sen. Stabenow: I'm so glad to be able to respond to that because first of all, the folks looking at that don't understand we are not doing subsidies anymore. We only are

doing insurance, which we share the cost in, and we are doing help in disaster or, if there's a market loss, a price loss, and you get zero help unless there is a loss. Now—

Mr. Bjerga: But there are target prices. I mean, there are mechanisms.

Sen. Stabenow: But that is if...you don't get that—corn prices are high right now. If corn prices don't dip, you get zero. If you don't have a weather disaster, you get zero. We have said no more millionaire farmers. If you're a millionaire you don't even qualify for any of this. We cap the overall—first time ever, ever, ever, an overall cap on the commodity title.

Even though you don't get any help unless there's a loss, the amendment, which I strongly supported in the Senate and fought for, Senator Grassley's amendment, was an overall cap on both what you can receive under target prices or a revenue program, and loans, and it was \$125,000 total. Underneath that he capped each area separately. We kept the overall cap, which is, first time ever, we have capped loans or anything else in terms of the overall cap on the commodity title, but we left flexibility so if you want a higher loan, you get lower payment limits, if you want higher payment limits for target prices, you get lower loans.

So I understand all this stuff is very complicated, and the folks that traditionally look at this are looking at it through the old lens. And so what I'm saying to folks is that this is a new day here. This is not a bait and switch shuffle. We are fundamentally saying we are not paying farmers just because they grow corn, wheat, cotton, rice and so on. You have to buy insurance or you are covered up to a certain point. If you have a loss that's a \$500,000 loss, under the commodity title the most you could receive is \$125,000. And you can't get a dollar unless you have a loss. So I'm happy to talk to anyone on this because it's just, it's a different day.

I'm not saying this is perfect. I mean, every farm bill there are things that I personally would write differently. It's 12 different bills hooked together called titles. But I will tell you, between the commodity title, where, when you look overall, 31% reduction in the commodity title as opposed to 1% in nutrition. For the first time we have a conservation title spending more than the commodity title. I mean, we are fundamentally shifting to investments in land and water protection, supporting farmers through insurance, and supporting folks who have not had a lot of support, like fruit and vegetable growers and organics.

Mr. Bjerga: And as you alluded to, getting a bill passed, there's no bill that every person will agree with every element in it. And one of the last minute battles that erupted was over meat labels. We have a regime in the United States right now where meat needs to be labeled by country of origin. This is a sensitive issue with Canada and Mexico. They've fought before the WTO. They've won. The U.S. has responded.

And a lot of your meatpackers really would like to see a relief on these labels so that they don't have as stringent of a requirement. There was a big push to get a change in the language, the language was not changed. You have groups like the National Cattlemen's Beef Association saying they're going to continue to fight this, and it will continue to be fought because there's going to be more WTO action. So how does this stand as an outstanding issue post farm bill, and how do you see it progressing in the months and years ahead?

Sen. Stabenow: Well, first of all, we have a first time ever permanent livestock disaster assistance program in this bill, which was the number one priority of all these groups. We then have gone on to have rigorous support for exports, very important, and specific things for livestock on conservation. And so there's the most significant investment to support the livestock community and ranchers that we have ever seen in a farm bill.

You're right, at the last minute they decided, well, once they got the permanent livestock disaster assistance, they switched to something else that was in neither bill. Neither bill eliminated labeling for meat. There was not support by a majority of Democrats or Republicans to eliminate the labeling for meat. We worked with them to try to find some way to address this in a compromise. They took a hard position of all or nothing. They wanted to eliminate it or nothing.

And we said that we would prefer to leave it to the WTO. The U.S. is appealing. There's a 50-50 chance that they will win. If the U.S. loses, that label will be gone or changed anyway. And if they win, then we will have to address it. But from a consumer standpoint, folks should understand these folks don't want us to label something that's grown or processed and so on in the United States.

Right now we have a United States label, and these folks are fighting and ask that we have no label whatsoever, which there was not support for as Republicans or Democrats. It's not within the jurisdiction of the farm bill. We would have been happy to work in some way with them to solve the problem. But it was very disappointing to see a group of people decide, after we had met their top priorities within the farm bill, to decide to do what I believe was an incredible overreach. And they were not successful. There was not the support.

Mr. O'Keefe: To get back to this question of the future of the farm bill, you've worked on this for three years.

Sen. Stabenow: This is my fourth farm bill.

Mr. O'Keefe: Okay, your fourth. Yeah, exactly. Fourth version of it, right?

Sen. Stabenow: Well, it's actually fourth, I mean fourth in the sense that I did one in the House and three in the Senate, so yeah.

Mr. O'Keefe: In this age of austerity, this age of taking the time to read the bill, your legislation's going to get passed in three days, and maybe you and Thad Cochran

and Frank Lucas and Collin Peterson are the only people who actually read the whole thing or have some good sense of it. I mean, having spent three years doing this, it's two years overdue, it deals with such a huge part of the American economy. What are your impressions of the process and how it's been working? I mean, yes this is an example of regular order. Everyone in this town talks about getting back to regular order.

Sen. Stabenow: It is. Yeah, it is.

Mr. O'Keefe: But it took you three years.

Sen. Stabenow: Well, it did take us three years. I wish it hadn't taken us three years. The first time we passed the farm bill in the Senate the House didn't even take it up. The second time we passed it they took it up and it failed. And then they divided it up and there was all kinds of stuff that went on, so I can't control that.

The reality is that the fundamentals in this bill are very, very close to what we passed in the Senate, so our senators are very comfortable with this because it's within the framework. The conservation title almost exactly the same that we passed; specialty crops, fruits and vegetables; energy title; research title; rural development title, crop insurance. Probably the biggest difference is that we melded the commodity title, part of the House and part of the Senate. This is very close to what we passed in the Senate, and I think people feel comfortable with it.

Let me also stress something that I think is very important to me and we're very proud of. In this age of deficits, we are the only committee, on a bipartisan basis, that has cut our own area of jurisdiction. Everybody else goes, why don't you cut them over there? Ever since we had the super committee process three years ago, where every committee was asked to come up with savings, and Chairman Lucas and I and our ranking members decided at the time we were really going to do that, and that formed the framework.

We came up with \$23 in savings which, by the way, is what we have ended up with, so we stayed within the framework of what we came up with. We proposed savings. The super committee process on deficit reduction fell apart. We took that, we wrote a farm bill, we wrote another farm bill, and we're at the end of a process where we are the only part of the federal government to produce savings in our own areas of jurisdiction, and we eliminated about a hundred different programs or authorizations that were duplicative or no longer made sense. And so I would challenge my colleagues if they did what we did, we'd have a balanced budget.

Mr. Bjerga: Senator, talking about the fiscal environment, you have a unique perspective as Chairwoman of the Senate Agriculture Committee because you're dealing with the whole swatch of rural America and your own state has a major metropolitan area, some smaller cities and then some vast rural areas.

Listening to President Obama's State of the Union address and hearing the themes of inequality in America, when you're looking at rural America, when you're

looking at places outside the Beltway, how do you see that playing with the general population? There's a lot of concern among Democrats of keeping the majority. You have your own colleague who is up for reelection. How does this play out as a theme in 2014, and how do you expect Americans will respond to this message in the coming months?

Sen. Stabenow: I think this is absolutely on point. I mean, the reality is today that since the turnaround has really begun that very few people are feeling the benefits of that, unfortunately. They haven't had the opportunity to be able to work within the new economy, get the job training they need, have the jobs that they need. Most folks are either just holding on to stay in the middle class or they've slid out of the middle class at this point in time and feel that it's not fair that they're not having an equal opportunity to be able to really move ahead like we've always seen.

I mean, it's really... We won't have a middle class if the numbers continue that we see today. The 400 wealthiest families in our country have the same amount of money as 150 million Americans. I don't begrudge people doing well and being wealthy, but we're not going to have an economy, we're not going to have a middle class unless those 150 million people have the same kind of fair shot to make it.

Now, many of them in rural America, we think of those in terms of cities. In Michigan many, many, many that are struggling barely to make it, including farmers that we have that are struggling to make it right now, small farms. So the challenge of our time—the challenge of our time is to do everything possible to give people the opportunity to be in the middle class, be successful, benefit from this strong economy and know, frankly, that if you work 40 hours a week you're not going to be in poverty.

Mr. Slen: Unfortunately, time for one more question.

Mr. O'Keefe: Just real quick. This week you and your Senate Democratic colleagues met with the Treasury Secretary ahead of the need to raise the debt ceiling. What did he tell you and what is the plan among Democrats?

Sen. Stabenow: Well, very soon we're going to be in a situation where we're not going to be able to pay our bills, and shame on us as America if that's the case. We ought to make sure that the bills we've already committed to are paid. Everybody is responsible in their own family for doing that and we need to do that as a country. To me it's pretty simple. The Constitution requires us to do it and we ought to make sure that we're paying our bills.

Mr. O'Keefe: So no negotiating with Republicans?

Sen. Stabenow: I don't think you negotiate on paying your bills. I mean, we can negotiate a lot of things. I've been negotiating for three years on agriculture and food policy. But when it comes time to pay the bills, I think it's our responsibility to pay the bills.

Mr. Bjerga: Could you tolerate some offsets, or do you want a clean debt ceiling raising?

Sen. Stabenow: We don't negotiate about paying our bills.

Mr. Slen: Senator Stabenow, just very quickly back to the farm bill. For those out there who aren't as involved in it as you, what is the cost to the American taxpayer for this bill?

Sen. Stabenow: Well, we are looking overall at about, it's 900 and some billion dollars overall that includes our help for needy families, and the majority of that goes to those who find themselves in a difficult position, or maybe our seniors, people with disabilities, our veterans, disabled veterans coming home, and then the balance of that is the largest investment we made in land and water conservation as a country, the support for agriculture in the form of help when there's a disaster or a loss, and then finally in jobs.

We've not really talked about today the new effort around bio energy. There's something called bio-based manufacturing where we're bringing together manufacturing and agriculture to use agricultural products to offset chemicals in manufacturing. We have all kinds of new opportunities to create jobs in this bill. And we invest in research and bio-based manufacturing, and in other opportunities that will grow the economy.

Mr. Slen: And that's 900 billion divided by five years?

Sen. Stabenow: No, that's actually ten years.

Mr. O'Keefe: It's out over ten years.

Mr. Slen: Ten year bill. How much is that saving from previous farm bills?

Sen. Stabenow: Well, the overall savings is \$23 billion, and that includes the sequestration cut. And so we've already put in place about 6 billion in sequestration cut and we've added to that in this bill to make it about 23 billion.

Mr. Slen: Could you support cuts to the size of the Agriculture Department?

Sen. Stabenow: Well, we're doing that. I mean, the Department of Agriculture, actually, because we've seen agricultural research cut through the appropriations process, because of sequestration, I think they're pretty much close to the top of being cut more, percentage-wise, than any other area of the federal government. I mean, I don't know the exact number, but they've been, percentage-wise, really cut.

And so we're saying that if you want to have a safe, affordable food supply, supporting our farmers is a part, is a very big part of that. We in America are very, very blessed. Sixteen million people work because of agriculture. It's the largest trade surplus that we have. We are literally feeding the world, selling to the world,

creating jobs through exports. We want them to do well. If they do well, then America does well.

Mr. Slen: And we'll be watching the Senate this coming week as it takes up the farm bill. Senator Debbie Stabenow is the chair of the Agriculture Committee.

Sen. Stabenow: Thank you.

Mr. Slen: And we will be right back with our two reporters, Ed O'Keefe of the Washington Post and Alan Bjerga of Bloomberg. And we are back at *Newsmakers* with our press panel. Alan Bjerga of Bloomberg, what did you learn from Senator Stabenow today?

Mr. Bjerga: Well, today I learned that she's very prepared to defend against any attacks on this bill, which isn't a big surprise. I mean, she's been talking about this almost daily for about three years now and certainly knows chapter and verse. The challenge for her is, of course, by negotiating with the Republicans and coming up with a conference committee agreement, she may be defending some things that were not the ideas of her own chair and her own chamber. So she seems to be doing a very able job on that.

She gets awfully into the weeds, and the challenge is to pull her out of that, because she has been living this and breathing this. America wants to know about this farm bill, and she's been talking to farmers and ranchers and food stamp activists for the past three years.

Mr. Slen: Mr. O'Keefe.

Mr. O'Keefe: I think one of the things to remember, the fact that she's been doing this for three years, she said four different versions of the farm bill, is she probably has better exposure and understanding now of the troubles inside the Republican Party than most Democrats, if you think about it, because this bill deals with all sorts of issues that are facing the GOP. You've got spending, you've got issues with benefit entitlement programs, with really fundamental concerns of the Republican Party, and she's had to live through it, really, as a witness over the past few years.

What the House did over the summer, when they divided the farm bill for the first time in 30 years, the part that dealt with food stamps and the part that dealt with all the other commodity and farm policy issues, she had to stomach that and risked really having this whole process collapse, but was somehow able to find a way to work through it. In talking to her people and talking to Frank Lucas, the House Agriculture Committee chairman, I think they had a really good understanding that if they just kept their heads down, if they all understood what might be coming their way, that they would somehow be able to prevail.

And I think they had a very good series of points to make to their colleagues, that 16 million jobs are tied to this, there's somewhere between 16 and \$23 billion worth of cuts, depending on who you ask, and in this age where you're looking for this

kind of thing, that's a good selling point, and they had to get it done. So you're able to talk about spending, job creation and congressional productivity in a bill, [took] quite so long. But again, she's a great witness to the problems with Republicans, it seems.

Mr. Slen: Well, Ed O'Keefe, what's the relationship between Senator Stabenow and Congressman Lucas? Oklahoma, Michigan. You know, members of Congress can be awfully parochial at times, and those two states don't necessarily have a lot in common.

Mr. O'Keefe: They don't except that they have two lawmakers who earned their seniority through an important committee to their states. By all indications, and seeing them both publicly and in talking to their staffs, they got along well. They understood they had to get this done. There were at times, I think, some conflicts on certain things. Frankly, Alan, you probably have a better understanding of than most people.

But I think they understood they had a job to do, that they had to find a way to balance the needs of farmers and the agricultural sector with the needs and the challenges facing their party colleagues. And they've done a remarkable bit of work. I mean, yes, there are people who are unhappy about it, but they did get it done. It is a significant amount of money. Nobody's happy, and by design. That's kind of what an omnibus piece of legislation is supposed to be.

Mr. Bjerga: What I think is interesting is this farm bill has already passed the Senate twice, overwhelmingly, and it will probably do very well this week. President Obama has said he's going to sign it into law. If you take a look at the House of Representatives vote, you've seen several votes right now where since, really, the government shutdown, Speaker Boehner's been much more willing to do things that will gain Democratic support, and then let some Republicans maybe fall by the wayside in the interest of getting things done. We'll see if this pattern repeats itself.

Chairman Lucas was someone who was in a real bind last July. He's been in the House for 20 years. He's trying to work across the aisle with Senator Stabenow, and here he is with problems within his own caucus. Those seem to have eased up a little bit, and the Frank Lucases are able to get things done a little bit more than they used to in the past because they're almost allowed to work with the Debbie Stabenows to get some things done. And that'll be a really interesting political dynamic to watch, especially in the House and, to a certain extent, in the Senate moving forward.

Mr. Slen: Alan Bjerga, what did you not get to ask her?

Mr. Bjerga: I would have been really interested in her opinion on immigration. That is going to be a big issue coming forth. It's of big interest to the agricultural community as well as manufacturing and tech. And if this coalition is indeed forming, this farm bill coalition, this renewed, at least somewhat spirited

bipartisanship in Washington, and this coalition in the House, it'll be interesting to see how these Frank Lucases and Debbie Stabenows can work together in the future.

Mr. O'Keefe: Yeah. I think that's one point. The other we should be mindful of is the Michigan Senate race is a sleeper race. Her colleague, Carl Levin, is retiring. It's one that Republicans increasingly think they might have a good opportunity to hold onto. If that starts to happen, that's a problem for Democrats, because they'd like to confine the competitive races to really no more than six or seven. But if they have to start defending seats like Michigan, like New Hampshire, like Colorado, the majority of the Senate could be at stake for Democrats. It's not hers to lose, but she certainly has insights into it, and something is afoot in Michigan that suggests that seat might be in play.

Mr. Slen: Back to the farm bill. How involved was Secretary Vilsack in this negotiation?

Mr. Bjerga: It was striking, and there was some criticism that the White House wasn't involved enough throughout the process. During the Bush White House you had set farm bill plans, you had real active lobbying on the Hill. This was much more beside the scenes.

But for the USDA it's very key to remember that at the very end one of the controversies of this bill was actually over dairy policy. Very passionate disputes over the shape of the new dairy program, and the House and Democrats and Republicans were very much at loggerheads at this, and there was no resolution.

They actually brought in the chief economist from the USDA, Joe Glauber, they started looking at what the USDA could do, and so at that key moment, with sort of a light touch, they did come to a resolution on a very difficult issue. Now, of course, the question is implementation, and that's where the agency becomes most important moving forward.

Mr. Slen: Alan Bjerga is with Bloomberg, Ed O'Keefe is with the Washington Post. Gentlemen, thanks for being on *Newsmakers*.

Mr. O'Keefe: Thank you.

Mr. Bjerga: Thank you.

[*End of recording.*]