



National Conference of State Legislatures Office of State-Federal Relations

USDA Unveils 2018 Legislative Priorities and Farm Bill Principles

On Jan. 24, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary, Sonny Perdue, announced the department's [Farm Bill and Legislative Principles for 2018](#). Released as 2018 Farm Bill negotiations are ongoing in both chambers of Congress, USDA broke its principles into nine headlines: farm production and conservation; trade and foreign agricultural affairs; food, nutrition and consumer services; marketing and regulatory programs; food safety and inspection services; research, education and economics; rural development; natural resource and environment; and management.

The principles released by USDA provide insight into the main areas USDA will be pushing for as 2018 Farm Bill negotiations continue. The 2014 Farm Bill expires at midnight, Sept. 30, leaving approximately 8 months for Congress to take action. For more information on the Farm Bill, please contact NCSL Staff, [Ben Husch](#), or [Kristen Hildreth](#).

In May 2017, NCSL, along with the National Governors Association and National Association of State Departments of Agriculture issued a [letter](#) to congressional leaders outlining our key principles for the next farm bill. NCSL issued a [letter](#) earlier this month, opposing H.R. 3599, a bill that would significantly erode the authority of states to regulate agriculture products and preempt many existing state laws. NCSL's [NRI Committee](#) has a number of agricultural related policies that provide the foundation for the advocacy work we do on behalf of states. Those policies—National Agriculture, Animal Agriculture Production, and Rural Policy—can be read [online](#).

A brief overview of USDA's [Farm Bill and Legislative Principles for 2018](#) is below:

Farm Production & Conservation

The department calls for innovative crop insurance programs, economic safety nets for American farmers, strengthened young-and-beginning farmers programs, and conservation programs that both balance farm productivity and ensures cost-effective financial assistance for related benefits such as soil health, and other natural resource improvements.

Trade & Foreign Agricultural Affairs

The department urges improving U.S. market competitiveness through the following: strengthening the accountability of export promotion programs; incentivizing stronger financial partnerships; ensuring the Farm Bill is consistent with U.S. international trade laws and obligations and increasing USDA expertise to “effectively monitor” foreign practices that may impede agricultural exports.

Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services

USDA calls on Congress to harness the nation’s “agricultural abundance” to support nutrition assistance programs; create a pathway to self-sufficiency for individuals receiving such assistance through encouraging state and local innovations in training, case management and program design, and root out fraud and abuse of such programs through shared data, innovation, and technology modernization.

Marketing & Regulatory Programs

In an effort to safeguard the U.S. agricultural supply, the department calls for the enhancement of partnerships and tools to prevent, mitigate, and eradicate pests and diseases, which are harmful to agriculture; bolster security of the nation’s food supply through modernization of biosecurity, prevention, surveillance, emergency response, and border security; provide effective oversight of organic production practices; and reducing regulatory burdens to specialty crop growers to foster market and growth opportunities.

Food Safety & Inspection Services

The principles call on Congress to support and enhance [Food Safety and Inspection Service](#) programs to ensure efficient regulation and safety of food products to provide for the protection of public health and prevent foodborne illnesses; and to allocate USDA resources for products and processes that pose the greatest public health risks.

Research, Education & Economics

The department calls on Congress to commit to a research agenda that places the United States at the “forefront” of scientific development surrounding food and agriculture products; and to empower public-private partnerships (P3s) to leverage federal dollars, allowing for increased capacity and investments in infrastructure and human capital for modern food and agricultural science.

Rural Development

The department looks to partner with state and local communities to invest in rural infrastructure to support rural prosperity and innovation—notably signaling the need for high-speed, reliable internet in these areas.

Natural Resource & Environment

As wildfire season gets longer and fires burn hotter, USDA calls on Congress to expand Good Neighbor Authority, increasing coordination with states to better improve forest health; engage in cost-effective forest management; supply tools and resources to incentivize private stewardship and retention of forest land; and reduce impediments to “timely” environmental

review, harvesting, forest management, and habitat protection to improve the health of the nation's forests.

Management

USDA urges Congress to provide a Farm Bill which reflects the administration's budget goals; and to recognize the "unique labor needs" of agriculture and allow the department to play a role in the development of agricultural workforce policy.