



July 20, 2023

Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition, and Forestry

Honorable Glenn “GT” Thompson
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture

Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition, and Forestry

Honorable David Scott
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture

*Re: How CBO Is Responding to Requests for Estimates Related to the
Reauthorization of the Farm Bill*

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Chairman Thompson, and Ranking Members
Boozman and Scott:

You asked about the Congressional Budget Office’s efforts to provide budgetary analysis related to the reauthorization of what is commonly known as the farm bill. I understand that the timely delivery of CBO’s estimates is critical to the legislative process and central to fulfilling the agency’s mission of supporting the Congress. CBO is working hard to ensure that your committees have the information they need as quickly as possible.

The Farm Bill and CBO’s Role

As you know, the farm bill governs a wide array of agriculture and nutrition programs, and its development takes many months. Members of CBO’s staff have been working closely with the staff members of your committees for several months to provide budgetary estimates for provisions under consideration as you craft the legislation and to answer questions about those estimates. In addition, analysts have been providing extensive information about different aspects of CBO’s baseline budget projections.

Technical assistance provided by CBO's analysts often encompasses multiple variations of a legislative proposal and frequently involves assessing the budgetary implications of effects on multiple crops and other aspects of farm or nutrition programs. For this reauthorization of the farm bill, CBO's analysts have already provided more than 1,000 estimates. CBO expects to furnish hundreds more in the coming weeks and many more later in the legislative process.

Additional CBO Resources Allocated to Analysis of the Farm Bill

To ensure that you receive information when it is most useful, CBO has assigned additional analysts from throughout the agency to work on the farm bill. Within CBO's Budget Analysis Division, staff members who ordinarily work on other topics are shifting to this analysis and providing estimates for provisions affecting nutrition programs. Other analysts are assisting by handling unrelated tasks for core agriculture analysts, freeing them to focus entirely on the farm bill.

Outside of the Budget Analysis Division, staff members with a breadth of skills are performing critical tasks to contribute to the work on the farm bill. Analysts in CBO's Financial Analysis Division are assisting in modeling the effects of the Conservation Reserve Program, conducting outreach to experts on commodity programs, and helping in other ways. An analyst in CBO's Microeconomic Studies Division is supporting the Budget Analysis Division, and analysts in the Labor, Income Security, and Long-Term Analysis Division are providing technical support for CBO's analysis of nutrition programs. Staff members of the Tax Analysis Division are helping develop and analyze data on the income of people who receive assistance under the farm bill.

By taking those steps and providing additional support across divisions, CBO is able to devote extensive resources to analyzing the farm bill while ensuring the continued performance of the agency's other statutorily required duties, such as providing estimates for appropriation bills and estimating the costs of other bills approved by committees. Securing additional personnel from outside the agency to work on the farm bill is not practical at this point, as it would delay work on the current legislation because of the time it would take to bring new people up to speed on CBO's estimating models and procedures.

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CBO will continue to work hard to support your committees in their important work. My colleagues and I will be in regular contact to keep you apprised of our progress and to ensure that CBO understands your priorities and legislative schedule. Please let me know if you have any additional concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Phillip L. Swagel", with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Phillip L. Swagel
Director

cc: Honorable Jodey Arrington
Chairman
House Committee on the Budget

Honorable Brendan F. Boyle
Ranking Member
House Committee on the Budget

Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse
Chairman
Senate Committee on the Budget

Honorable Chuck Grassley
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on the Budget