

Food and Agriculture

With Republicans taking control of the House while Democrats retain control of the Senate, organizations interested in food and agriculture policy need to prepare for the realities of divided government, narrow majorities and changes in leadership. Food and agriculture policy in Congress will be driven by debate and passage of a new omnibus farm bill before the current law expires in September 2023. The farm bill is a major legislative initiative designed to ensure food security, support farmers and rural communities across the country and promote sustainable American agriculture. It will authorize hundreds of billions of dollars in funding for commodity programs, crop insurance and disaster relief, conservation efforts, food and nutrition programs, rural development, foreign trade, agricultural research and more.

AREAS OF POTENTIAL BIPARTISANSHIP

- Expansion of domestic agriculture production and export
- Forest management
- Impact of inflation on domestic food prices

LIKELIHOOD OF POTENTIAL LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY ACTIONS

Based on National Journal's industry impact summaries, the outlook for a number of high-profile actions under a Republican-controlled House and Democrat-controlled Senate is as follows:

Likelihood Of Potential Legislative And Regulatory Actions

- Forest management: **Likely**
- Research and development: **Likely**
- Crop insurance reform: **Possible**
- Nutrition assistance cuts/reforms: **Unlikely**
- Conservation reforms: **Unlikely**

COMMITTEE LEADERSHIP

SENATE AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION AND FORESTRY

Chair:

Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.)

Ranking Member:

John Boozman (R-Ark.)

SENATE ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

Chair:

Sen. Thomas Carper (D-Del.)

Ranking Member:

Shelly Moore Capito (R-W.Va.)

HOUSE AGRICULTURE

Chair:

Glenn Thompson (R-Penn.)

Ranking Member:

David Scott (D-Ga.)

HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES

Chair:

Bruce Westerman (R-Ark.)

Ranking Member:

Raul Grijalva (D-Ariz.)

CONSIDERATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS

Organizations following food and agriculture policy should have the following considerations in mind as they prepare to engage on these issues during the 118th Congress:

- **Don't be late to the process of shaping and influencing the farm bill.** The farm bill is high stakes for farm and food advocacy groups, states and rural community stakeholders. The effort to influence the outcome of the 2023 bill is already underway, with major commodity and other advocacy groups seeking to inform funding levels, program reforms and other priorities. Public hearings have already started around the country – an opportunity for agribusiness and advocacy groups to provide input.

- **Narrow majorities and a divided Congress will make the process messy and divisive.** Incoming House Agriculture Committee chair Glenn Thompson (R-Penn.) plans to schedule farm bill hearings early in 2023 with the goal of passing the bill out of the House by July. He'll have to navigate both the Republican caucus and Democrats to ensure there are the votes. Points of contention include policies and funding levels for food and nutrition, which are the costliest programs, and conservation programs' climate-related provisions. The Senate is unlikely to pass the House bill as is – expect major changes as in past farm bills, particularly as Senate Agriculture Committee chair Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.) looks to align with administration priorities.

- **Be prepared for heated debate over the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).** SNAP accounts for about 75 percent of the farm bill – 41 million Americans currently receive benefits. It's also a topic of significant disagreement between the parties, from benefits and access to overall funding. Passage of both the 2014 and 2018 farm bills was delayed due to disputes over SNAP; that could happen again next year.

- **The Biden Administration will continue to advance its food and agriculture agenda,** including the national strategy on food, nutrition and health unveiled in September 2022. Front-of-package labeling will be a source of debate ahead of a Food and Drug Administration (FDA) proposal for a standardized labeling system to help consumers make nutritional choices. Climate, racial equity and antitrust issues in the agriculture sector are also priorities across the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Department of Justice. In addition, there are opportunities for companies and rural communities to secure federal support for investments resulting from implementation of the 117th Congress's infrastructure and climate bills.

- **House Republicans will step up oversight of the USDA, intersecting with other hot-button issues such as equity, climate and immigration.** Scrutiny will no doubt be focused on climate-related policies and regulations, such as administration efforts to reduce carbon emissions in agriculture, as well as racial equity and immigration issues, particularly as farmers and ranchers confront a labor shortage.