

## **ESPM 226: Untangling the Farm Bill Spring 2018 (3 credits)**

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Class meetings: Thursdays, 12-2 pm  
2038 Valley Life Sciences  
CCN: 42043

This seminar focuses on real-world understanding of the main vehicle through which the American agricultural economy is supported, the Farm Bill. The Farm Bill is an omnibus legislation reauthorized by Congress every five years, and rooted in the 1933 Agricultural Adjustment Act. While this history is very important, we won't spend too long on that history. 2018 is a Farm Bill reauthorization year, and so we will focus mainly on the unfolding dynamics in Congress and around the country, as advocates, corporations, pundits, farmers, and food producers jockey for influence and a piece of the almost \$500 billion five-year legislation.

The course will begin with four weeks of general introduction to the bill, and some deeper investigation of a few key titles (or chapters) in the bill. Then, we will welcome student proposals to cover topics of their interest during three weeks of student-led seminars in the middle of the course. These issues may be included in the bill but deserve more attention (for example, farmer veterans or free trade agreements like NAFTA), or may not be included in the bill but are of ongoing interest and importance (for example, immigration or FDA-regulated food safety). We will also spend time examining the main legislative bodies with jurisdiction over the Farm Bill: the House and Senate Agriculture Committees and the House and Senate Agricultural Appropriations Subcommittees. We will end with student production of short policy communications pieces (an op-ed, fact sheet, or backgrounder) and presentation and discussion of these works.

The goals of our course include:

- To gain a general knowledge of the jurisdiction and historical roots of the Farm Bill;
- To gain a basic fluency of the Farm Bill titles and how they are implemented at the federal, state, and local levels;
- To gain an understanding of the political, cultural, economic, and interpersonal dynamics that shape each Farm Bill's passage;
- To learn how to navigate existing and emerging tools and resources to understand the Farm Bill;
- To develop the practical skills to evaluate proposed changes to the Farm Bill and assess their likelihood of passage and factors affecting implementation;
- To practice and perfect political communications skills that can be transferred to any other legislative issue or government program of future interest.

### **Overview of Assignments:**

1. Readings
2. Prepare and present on a Farm Bill marker bill (15-20 minutes), based on random lottery

3. Prepare and present on one member of the House or Senate Ag Committees (5 mins), based on random lottery
4. Propose and vote on “student choice topics” for weeks 8-10. Join one of three groups to present on chosen topics.
5. Prepare one of the following for final presentation:
  1. Solid, researched policy brief for policymaker consumption on one proposed improvement to the Farm Bill. It can build on an existing marker bill, or you can propose your own. Total length of policy brief not to exceed three pages (including graphics).
  2. Solid, researched op-ed/essay (up to 1,200 words) for newspaper or magazine publication critiquing some part of the bill or proposing reform.

You will present your work at a public forum over RRR week.

Publication of your work on #2 above in a major national or DC-based mainstream publication\* will result in an automatic “A” in the course.

\*”Major national or DC-based mainstream publication” means the New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, Politico, The Hill, Newsweek, Time, etc. It does not mean a blog or partisan publication.

#### **Grading:**

- Final assignment = 40% (unless published, see above)
- Presentations = 40%
- Participation = 20% (attendance and engagement in seminar format, including reading on current events and ongoing Farm Bill negotiations, see below)

#### **COURSE MATERIALS**

(1) Imhoff, Dan, Michael Pollan, and Frederick L. Kirschenmann. *Food fight: the citizens guide to the next food and farm bill*. Healdsburg, CA: Watershed Media, 2012.

(2) Current events: You are expected to read (in print or online), at least weekly, a national daily publication influential in agricultural policy matters—for example, the Agri-Pulse, the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, Politico’s Morning Ag newsletter, FERN’s Ag Insider -- as a basis for class discussion and analysis of food and nutrition policy events as they occur in real time.

(3) Articles and resources indicated below (links below or copies available on bCourses)

## COURSE READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

### **Week 1 (Jan 18): Introduction to US Food & Farm Policy (the Farm Bill & beyond)**

In order to discuss the Farm Bill, we all need to be on roughly the same page in terms of its historical origins and current jurisdiction. Much of government comes down to jurisdiction. This weeks' readings will address in practical and humorous ways the unwieldy nature of the Farm Bill, as well as share some basic numbers and acronyms that everyone should know.

#### *Readings:*

- “The farm bill drove me insane,” by Marion Nestle. Politico, March 17, 2016 <https://www.politico.com/agenda/story/2016/03/farm-bill-congress-usda-food-policy-000070>
- “What is the Farm Bill,” by Renee Johnson and Jim Monke (Congressional Research Service, October 5, 2017). <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RS22131.pdf>

#### *Presentations:*

Random lottery for individual presentations on marker bills and House or Senate Agriculture Committee member later in the semester. You will present on an in-play marker bill that will be in that title, or policy proposals you can find related to that title - it may not be a bill yet but various players may have ideas and proposals out. You can trade with classmates if you don't like your lottery pick.

### **Week 2 (Jan 25): Horticulture & Organic Agriculture (marker bill presentations start today)**

While one of the smaller titles in the Farm Bill, this one disproportionately impacts California, which grows one-third of the nation's vegetables and two-third's of the nation's fruits and nuts. Our state is also responsible for 40 percent of the nation's organic production. We will try to contextualize what this means within the Farm Bill and get up to date on current issues affecting organic agriculture and “horticulture.”

#### *Readings:*

- “Agricultural Act of 2014: Highlights and Implications: Organic Agriculture.” <https://www.ers.usda.gov/agricultural-act-of-2014-highlights-and-implications/organic-agriculture/>
- “Federal Benefits for Livestock and Specialty Crop Producers.” by Stephanie Mercier. Choices, 4<sup>th</sup> quarter 2016 31(4).
- “The vegetable technology gap.” by Helena Bottemiller Evich, Politico, March 8, 2017.

### **Week 3 (Feb 1): Commodity Programs and Credit**

Commodity support programs are one of the most important, and misunderstood, parts of the Farm Bill. The readings this week will introduce us to the basic features of the programs, and attempt to get us up to date on requests for reform from industry and advocates. We will be joined by one of the nation's foremost experts on federal farm policy.

Guest lecturer: Ferd Hoefner, Senior Strategic Advisor, National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition. Via Skype from Washington, DC.

*Readings:*

- “Path to the 2018 Farm Bill: Commodities and Crop Insurance,” NSAC Blog, March 20, 2017. <http://sustainableagriculture.net/blog/2018-farm-bill-commodities/>
- “National Corn Growers Association 2017 Platform: Position Number II-A-2 and II-A-3.” Pages 23-25. <http://www.ncga.com/upload/files/documents/pdf/Policy%20Book/Policy-and-Position-Papers-v.-7.20.17-FINAL.pdf>
- Coppess, J., C. Zulauf, G. Schnitkey, and N. Paulson. "[Reviewing the June 2017 CBO Baseline.](#)" *farmdoc daily* (7):127, Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, July 14, 2017.
- McFadden, J.R. & Hoppe, R.A. [Evolving Distribution of Payments From Commodity Conservation, and Federal Crop Insurance Programs](#), EIB-184, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, November 2017.

**Week 4 (Feb 8): Trade**

While other bills and agencies are undoubtedly involved in overseas trade, the trade title of the Farm Bill and some of its precursors are important elements to understand how the US is seen internationally and who the customers and recipients are for a vast amount of American agricultural products.

Guest lecturer: Garrett Graddy-Lovelace, Assistant Professor, American University. Via Skype from Maryland.

*Readings:*

- [“Mexican civil society platform on the start of the renegotiation of NAFTA”](#) (in Spanish or English)
- Graddy-Lovelace, G. and A. Diamond. 2017. [“From Supply Management to Agricultural Subsidies—and Back Again? US Farm Bill & Agrarian \(In\)Viability”](#) *Journal of Rural Studies*. 50: 70-83.
- Patel, Raj. 2008. *Stuffed and Starved*. Chapter 4: “Just a Cry for Bread.” (Recommended to read entire book).

**Week 5 (Feb 15): Nutrition**

The readings this week will focus on the national landscape of SNAP, which comprise most of the Farm Bill’s annual outlays. We will also focus on its local and state implications and its interactions with other parts of the food economy, like farmers.

Guest lecturer: Shanti Prasad, Senior Policy Advocate, Alameda County Community Food Bank

*Readings:*

- [“A Short History of SNAP.”](#) USDA Food and Nutrition Service.
- Nestle, Marion. *Food Politics*. University of California Press, 2007. Part One (pages 29 – 92).
- Bartholow, Jessica. “Letter Opposing SB 134 (Rubio).” Western Center on Law and Poverty, February 20, 2013.

- Ichikawa, Nina F. [“Why City Slickers Should Care about the Farm Bill.”](#) *Al-Jazeera America*, December 4, 2013.

*Presentations:*

Propose and vote on student-initiated topics for Weeks 8-10 (group presentations).

**Week 6 (Feb 22): Civil Rights & “Outreach”**

The issue of racial justice in the Farm Bill (how it is advanced or eroded by the bill and its implementation) merits an entire course. However, the readings this week will attempt to give a cursory introduction to some of the main controversies regarding equal access to Farm Bill programs and services, and a few proposals to improve the USDA in terms of racial & cultural equity.

Guest lecturer: Hossein Ayazi, Research Assistant, Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society (and ESPM PhD candidate)

*Readings/Watchings:*

- SAFSF Webinar on HIFIS report: <http://www.safsf.org/farm-bill-report-webinar/>
- Davy, D.C., Horne, S., McCurdy, T.L., & Pennick, E. 2017. *Land Justice; Re-imagining Land, Food, and the Commons in the United States* (Chapter 2: Resistance, pp. 40-60).
- Fallenbaum, Nina Kahori. [“Why the Farm Bill Matters to Asian Americans.”](#) *Rafu Shimpō*, July 31, 2012.
- Mucioki, Megan, Jennifer Sowerwine, and Daniel Sarna-Wojcicki. ["Thinking inside and outside the box: local and national considerations of the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations \(FDPIR\)."](#) *Journal of Rural Studies* 57 (2018): 88-98.

**Week 7 (March 1): Rural Development**

The Rural Development mission area covers a tremendous range of services and funding for life in rural areas. Many people, particularly in areas untouched by RD funding, may not be aware of the scope of this mission area. Readings this week give an overview of how the agency evolved and what it covers now – as well as controversies related to its core premise.

Guest lecturer: Glenda Humiston, UCANR President, former California State Director, USDA Rural Development agency

*Readings:*

- Cowan, T. 2014. "An Overview of the USDA Rural Development Programs." U.S. Congressional Research Service. RL31837. Washington, D.C.: GPO. Available online: <https://www.hsdl.org/?home>
- “Time to Shut Down the USDA’s Rural Housing Service,” by John Ligon, Heritage Foundation, March 23, 2016. <http://www.heritage.org/housing/report/time-shut-down-the-usdas-rural-housing-service>
- Rasmussen, Wayne D. 1991. Farmers, Cooperatives, and USDA: A History of Agricultural Cooperative Service. Agricultural Information Bulletin 621. Pp 59-134.

## **Week 8 (March 8): Student choice topic presentations**

Guest lecturer: Liz Carlisle, author of “Lentil Underground” and numerous op-eds and academic papers, on “How to Write an Op-ed.”

### *Readings:*

- [“Obamacare and food as a public health concern,”](#) by Liz Carlisle, San Francisco Chronicle, August 10, 2015.
- [“The Downside of Eating Too Locally,”](#) by Liz Carlisle, The New York Times, November 26, 2014.

## **Week 9 (March 15): Student choice topic presentations**

## **Week 10 (March 22): Student choice topic presentations**

## **Week 11 (March 29): Spring Recess**

## **Week 12 (April 5): Research, Extension and Education**

This is where our location as university researchers becomes particularly pertinent. This week’s readings will look at historical funding for university research, extension, and education, and consider how that funding has evolved to include (or not) “fringe ideas” like organic.

Guest lecturer: Mark Lipson, tomato farmer, Senior Policy and Program Specialist, Organic Farming Research Foundation, and former Organic and Sustainable Policy Advisor to USDA Secretary Thomas Vilsack.

### *Readings:*

- [“Searching for the O Word: Analyzing the USDA Current Research Information System for Pertinence to Organic Farming,”](#) by Mark Lipson, Organic Farming Research Foundation, July 1998. Foreword and afterword only.
- Delonge, Marcia S., Albie Miles, and Liz Carlisle. [“Investing in the transition to sustainable agriculture.”](#) *Environmental Science & Policy* 55 (2016): 266-73. doi:10.1016/j.envsci.2015.09.013.
- [“Letter to House and Senate Agriculture Leadership,”](#) by Supporters of Agriculture Research (SoAR), October 20, 2017.
- [“End-of-Year Wrap-up from OFRF’s Policy Team,”](#) by Mark Lipson and Michael Stein, Organic Farming Research Foundation, December 21, 2017.

## **Week 13 (April 12): Conservation**

This week’s readings will cover the history of the federal agricultural lands conservation programs, a summary of the current situation, and some critiques and ideas for improving how conservation programs and payments work in the real world.

Guest lecturer: L. Ann Thrupp, Executive Director, Berkeley Food Institute, and former Manager of Sustainability and Organic Development at Fetzer and Bonterra Vineyards

*Readings:*

- Cain, Z., & Lovejoy, S. (2004). [History and outlook for Farm Bill conservation programs.](#) *Choices*, 19(4), 37-42.
- Lubben, B., & Pease, J. (2014). [Conservation and the Agricultural Act of 2014.](#) *Choices*, 29(2), 1-8.
- Batie, S. S. (2009). [Green payments and the US Farm Bill: information and policy challenges.](#) *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*, 7(7), 380-388.

See also: (1) the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition's comments for the 2018 cycle:

<http://sustainableagriculture.net/blog/conservation-consensus/>

(2) the American Bird Conservancy's comments for the 2018 cycle:

<https://abcbirds.org/article/farm-bill-works-landowners-birds-new-report-finds/>

### **Week 14 (April 19): Crop Insurance & Disaster Assistance**

While the impacts of climate change being experienced in coastal communities, on transit systems, and around the world, nowhere is it felt more starkly than on farms and ranches. Climate change is just one of the events that can be catastrophic to a farmer, requiring various types of insurance products and disaster aid. Readings this week will look at the changing policy levers the US Farm Bill has used and is considering to protect farmers from disasters while reducing taxpayer expenditures.

*Readings:*

- Themed issue of Choices: <http://www.choicesmagazine.org/choices-magazine/theme-articles/crop-insurance-in-the-20182019-farm-bill/theme-overview--crop-insurance-in-the-20182019-farm-bill>
- Ray, D., De La Torre Ugarte, D., Tiller, K. [“Rethinking US Agricultural Policy: Changing Course to Secure Farmer Livelihoods Worldwide.”](#) Agricultural Policy Analysis Center, The University of Tennessee, September 2003. Page 1-20 (reading beyond is optional but recommended)
- [“USDA Provides Greater Protection to Fruit, Vegetable and Other Specialty Crop Growers.”](#) Press Release No. 0269.14, USDA Office of Communications, December 12, 2014.

### **Week 15 (April 26): People and the Farm Bill**

Much attention is correctly placed on **policies** and **practices** when it comes to the Farm Bill. But what about **people**, those mortal beings charged with writing rules and regulations, hiring and firing, and guiding the Farm Bill from idea to implementation? Like anyone, members of Congress, USDA appointees, and USDA career in DC and in the field bring their idiosyncrasies and personal prejudices into their work. This week's readings focus on the people of the Trump administration and how they will influence this and future Farm Bills.

*Readings:*

- [“Inside Trump's Cruel Campaign Against the USDA's Scientists.”](#) by Michael Lesi, Vanity Fair, November 2017.

- [“How to Get Rich in Trump’s Washington,”](#) by Nicholas Confessore, The New York Times Magazine, August 30, 2017.
- [“United States Government Policy and Supporting Positions”](#) (the Plum Book), United States Senate, 2016. Pp 11-18 (Dept. of Agriculture section)

**Week of April 30:** Meet and work independently to plan final presentation

**May 10 (usual class meeting time):** Group presentations and a meal together