

Senate Appropriations Committee Passes FY 2012 Agriculture Appropriations Bill

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The Senate Appropriations Committee passed the FY 2012 Agriculture Appropriations legislation out of committee on September 7, 2011. This legislation, which funds the various programs within the Department of Agriculture and related agencies, represents a major improvement over the funding levels provided by the House in H.R. 2112, the House-passed version of FY 2012 Agriculture Appropriations. This bill includes \$19.780 billion in discretionary funding. This funding level is a reduction of \$138 million below FY 2011 discretionary funding levels, but an increase of \$2.699 billion more than was provided in H.R. 2112.

Among those programs funded by this bill are The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), and the Emerson/Leland Hunger Fellowship Program.

- **TEFAP Commodities:** Mandatory funding for TEFAP food commodities is provided at \$260 million. This funding reflects the mandatory funding level of \$250 million, as established by the 2008 Farm Bill, plus an adjustment for food price inflation. This amount is \$13.5 million more than was provided in FY2011 and \$60 million more than is provided in H.R. 2112.
- **TEFAP Storage and Distribution Grants** (i.e., TEFAP Administrative funding): These grants are funded at \$48 million. This is \$1.5 million less than was provided in FY2011, but \$10.5 million more than is provided in H.R. 2112. As in past years, a provision is also included in the bill that allows states, at their discretion, to transfer up to 10% of the value of their commodity allocation -- \$26 million in total -- into TEFAP Storage and Distribution Grant funding.
- **CSFP:** CSFP, which serves predominantly low-income seniors, is funded at \$176.788 million. This is \$38.288 million more than is provided in H.R. 2112 and will provide enough funding to continue serving the existing caseload of approximately 604,000 people. The Senate, however, did not provide the \$5 million needed in order for the 6 states with USDA-approved plans (CT, HI, ID, MD, MA, & RI) to begin service in FY2012.
- **WIC:** WIC is funded at \$6.582 billion. This is \$152 million less than was provided in FY2011, but an increase of \$581 million over the amount provided in H.R. 2112. According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, this level will fully fund participation in the program. The decrease from FY2011 is due to lower program participation rates than originally estimated. This level also provides \$60 million for breastfeeding peer counselors.
- **Emerson/Leland Hunger Fellowship Program:** The Hunger Fellowship is funded at \$2 million, \$500,000 more than is provided in H.R. 2112. Funding for this program was zeroed out in FY2011.

Typically this legislation would head next to the Senate floor for consideration, followed by a conference to reconcile the differences between the House and Senate bills. However, while full Senate consideration is still a possibility, with approximately 3 weeks remaining until the beginning of FY 2012, it is far more likely that Congress will pass a short-term Continuing Resolution (CR) in the coming weeks and that this legislation will get rolled into an Omnibus spending bill for FY2012 later this year.