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A Farm Bill For All

Judith Redmond says Congress needs to pass a farm bill that both feeds the hungry and supports California agriculture.

By Judith Redmond

In the D.C. deadlock over budgets and debt, there's more at stake than meets the eye, the farm bill for one. We all have a lot to lose if Congress fails to pass a farm bill. California is the most productive agricultural state in the country, and the farm bill includes programs that have real consequences for all of us. For example, farm bill programs include resources that help farmers transition to organic production; funds for the development of farmers' markets; and fresh produce for schools and hospitals. The farm bill also helps to feed hungry people -- four million Californians in 2012.

For decades lawmakers have gotten together every five years across party lines to craft our national food and farm policy. However, this summer the House Republican leadership split nutrition programs from the rest of the bill, and last month approved draconian cuts to those programs. Now Congress has the opportunity to fix the farm bill by tempering the cuts to nutrition while strengthening proven programs that lead to a healthier food system.

Several programs are a small but important piece of the farm bill budget pie: They assist beginning farmers with training; advance organic farming research and certification; and promote direct marketing of local farm products. Several of these crucial programs were placed on the budget chopping block and now face an uncertain future. These programs brought over \$20 million in competitive grants and loans to California since 2009, providing direct investment and training. It would be a mistake for a farm bill to move forward without them.

If Congress fails to pass a farm bill over the coming weeks and instead passes another extension, all of these important programs could end. Instead of building a better future for our farms and food system, Congress will just keep sending subsidies to absentee landlords.

The California delegation needs to work in a bi-partisan fashion to deliver a farm bill that both feeds hungry people and supports family farmers that produce our food.

With a Perspective, I'm Judith Redmond.

Judith Redmond is owner of Full Belly Farm, a certified organic farm in the Capay Valley north of San Francisco.

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