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What Farm Bill??? Whose Farm Bill??? Recent activities by Congress to produce a Farm Bill have left many small and family farmers wondering whether it's recycled from previous years. There are cuts to conservation, and no programs ensuring that farmers receive fair prices covering their costs of production (a living wage); instead we see forced reliance on a privatized insurance industry to provide a "safety net". As this process was done mostly behind closed doors with little opportunity for farmer input, we must try to work with what we have.

Once again, economically and environmentally sound farming took a hit. There are increasing demands for non-GMO crops, yet inadequate attention to markets and funding for research and development leave these opportunities in question. Hopefully by the weekend the bill will be signed by the President, and the process of appropriation and implementation will begin.

We must rely on Congress to maintain current programs by providing additional funds through their annual appropriations bills. While demand for USDA outreach and education programs increases, this bill cuts the mandatory funds by 50 percent - from \$20 million to \$10 million per year. These programs are especially critical for minority, veteran and other beginning farmers.

From the first Farm Bill in 1933, the purpose has been to ensure fair prices to farmers so that they can provide food and fiber for the American people. Now we have an export-driven Farm Bill and are told that we are producing for the world, which benefits only multi-national corporations. As we celebrate the UN's International Year of Family Farming (2014) around the world, we recall that the term **family farmer** originated in the United States.

Fortunately this Farm Bill does not unravel essential laws, such as Country of Origin Labeling (COOL), or the USDA's ability to address anti-trust violations and contract fairness issues through the Grain Inspection and Packers and Stockyards Administration (GIPSA). Both provisions were important wins in the 2002 and 2008 Farm Bills and were directly threatened by the 2014 House-passed Farm Bill.

Many organizations, such as the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, National Family Farm Coalition, Rural Coalition, Missouri Rural Crisis Center and other allies, have worked for over 25 years to keep the voice of family farmers heard across the country. Moving forward, food sovereignty – the right of everyone to receive a fair and living wage, equal access to fresh, high-quality food, and equal opportunities – is what we really need in the Farm Bill. Let's start to work now on the appropriations and implementation of this so-called Farm Bill to provide the best food possible for all Americans while revitalizing our rural economy.

Cooperatively Yours,

Ben F. Burkett

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