

Course Description

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to the breadth of policies and programs included in the federal multi-year food and farm omnibus authorizing legislation known as the Farm Bill. As of the writing of this syllabus, the status and future of the Farm Bill faces substantial uncertainty. Congress last reauthorized the Farm Bill in 2018 but has been unable to achieve timely reauthorization, originally scheduled for 2023. The 119th Congress, moreover, is currently debating an omnibus budget reconciliation bill that includes major revisions to the Farm Bill and presents an unprecedented challenge to the political coalition that has long supported reauthorization. The omnibus reconciliation bill with Farm Bill revisions included passed the House of Representatives in May and is awaiting action (as of this writing) in the Senate.

The significance of current events is better understood in both historical and political contexts. The Farm Bill dates to 1933 and the Great Depression; the modern Farm Bill and coalition dates to the inclusion of Food Stamps in 1973 and conservation in 1985. This coalition developed over time among farm commodity interests (corn, cotton, and wheat, etc.) that receive subsidies and for which crop insurance is available. By comparison, direct assistance to farmers was sporadically included prior to its permanent authorization in the 1985 Farm Bill. Food assistance to low-income households was enacted in 1964 and added to the Farm Bill in 1973. This formidable political coalition has successfully reauthorized Farm Bills for more than fifty years and this class will explore the historical and political developments. In recent years partisan political polarization and an increasing emphasis on federal budget policy have drastically altered the political landscape for the Farm Bill, as evidenced by the current reconciliation debate.

The class will begin by reviewing the current state of the Farm Bill and budget reconciliation. Students are expected to review the initial materials and to have some knowledge of the events in Congress leading up to the first day of class. Useful news sources include: [The Washington Post](#); [Politico](#); and [Farm Policy News](#). For additional information, please note that I am part of an outreach project that also provides original analysis of Farm Bill issues and other relevant matters called [farmdoc daily](#). Finally, if motivation (or a laugh) is necessary, or at least helpful, enjoy this interview ([Jimmy Kimmel Live](#)) or this discussion ([Last Week Tonight with John Oliver](#)).

Instructor(s)

Jonathan Coppess, associate professor of agricultural policy at the University of Illinois will teach the class in 2025. Jonathan previously served as chief counsel for the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture during the 2014 Farm Bill negotiations. During his time in Washington DC, Jonathan also served as Administrator of the Farm Service Agency and Legislative Assistant to U.S. Senator Ben Nelson. Note that *Chris Adamo* has previously co-

taught this class but is unavailable this year. His contributions are included in the syllabus and materials. Chris is currently Head of Global Sustainability Impact & B Corp, Danone; he formerly served as Staff Director, U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, and Chief of Staff, White House Council on Environmental Quality.

Work and Grading

There will be one take home final exam that will be due on the Monday following the final day of class. The exam will consist of short essay questions that must be completed by the student alone. The exam will be 75% of the grade and the remaining 25% of the grade will be based on class participation.

The following are the readings for class and classes when the material is expected to be covered. The readings and material covered is subject to change based on events in Congress, or other matters and events.

Class Readings		
#	Date	Assigned Readings
1	July 21	<p><i>Introductory & Background...</i></p> <p>Johnson, R. and J. Monke. "What is the Farm Bill?" Congressional Research Service. April 9, 2024. https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/RS22131?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%22farm+bill%22%7D&s=1&r=3.</p> <p>Bergh, K., D. Rosenbaum, and W. Tharpe. "House Reconciliation Bill Proposes Deepest SNAP Cut in History, Would Take Food Assistance Away From Millions of Low-Income Families." Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. May 28, 2025. https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/house-reconciliation-bill-proposes-deepest-snap-cut-in-history-would-take.</p> <p>Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. "By the Numbers: House Republican Reconciliation Bill Takes Food Assistance Away From Millions of People." May 13, 2025. https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/by-the-numbers-house-republican-reconciliation-bill-takes-food-assistance.</p> <p>Coppess, J., C. Zulauf, G. Schnitkey, N. Paulson and B. Sherrick. "Reviewing the House Agriculture Committee's Reconciliation Bill." <i>farmdoc daily</i> (15):89, Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, May 14, 2025.</p> <p>Schnitkey, G., N. Paulson, C. Zulauf and J. Coppess. "Spending Impacts of PLC and ARC-CO in House Agriculture Reconciliation Bill." <i>farmdoc daily</i> (15):93, Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, May 20, 2025.</p> <p>Coppess, J., G. Schnitkey, C. Zulauf and N. Paulson. "Reviewing the CBO Score of the House Reconciliation Bill." <i>farmdoc daily</i> (15):95, Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, May 22, 2025.</p>

		Other resources: https://policydesignlab.ncsa.illinois.edu/ .
2	July 22	<p><i>Historical & Political Development of the Farm Bill and It's Coalition...</i></p> <p>Coppess, Jonathan W. "High Cotton and the Low Road: An Unraveling Farm Bill Coalition and Its Implications." <i>Drake J. Agric. L.</i> 23 (2018): 353, http://aglawjournal.wp.drake.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/66/2019/11/Coppess-Macro-Reprinted.pdf.</p> <p>Secchi, Silvia. "The Role of Conservation in United States' Agricultural Policy from the Dust Bowl to Today: A Critical Assessment." <i>Ambio</i> 53, no. 3 (2024): 421-434. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13280-023-01949-7.</p> <p>Howlader, Aparna. "Environmental Recovery after the Dust Bowl: Implications of Land Policies in the Great Plains." <i>Journal of the Association of Environmental and Resource Economists</i> 11, no. 2 (2024): 403-449. https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/726154.</p>
3	July 23	<p><i>Thinking critically in a time of uncertainty...</i></p> <p>Smith, Bobby. "1964: The Untold Story of Food Stamp Politics." <i>Agricultural History</i> 98, no. 3 (2024): 453-461. https://read.dukeupress.edu/agricultural-history/article-pdf/98/3/453/2139577/453smith.pdf.</p> <p>Marzen, Chad G. "The 2018 Farm bill: Legislative Compromise in the Trump Era." <i>Fordham Envtl. L. Rev.</i> 30 (2018): 49. https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1813&context=elr.</p> <p>Morath, Sarah J. "The Farm Bill: A Wicked Problem Seeking a Systematic Solution." <i>Duke Envtl. L. & Pol'y F.</i> 25 (2014): 389. https://scholarship.law.duke.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1317&context=delpf.</p> <p>Ristino, Laurie, and Gabriela Steier. "Losing ground: A Clarion Call for Farm Bill Reform to Ensure a Food Secure Future." <i>Colum. J. Envtl. L.</i> 42 (2016): 59. https://doi.org/10.7916/cjel.v42i1.3732.</p> <p>Nestle, Marion. "Food Politics and Policy." In <i>Oxford research Encyclopedia of food studies</i>. 2024. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780197762530.013.19.</p>
4	July 24	<p><i>Matters of Political Development, Theory and the Like; A Discussion and an Attempt at Looking Ahead...</i></p> <p><i>Agricultural History</i>, Volume 98, Issue 3 (August 2024): https://read.dukeupress.edu/agricultural-history/issue/98/3, specifically:</p> <p>Staub, https://read.dukeupress.edu/agricultural-history/article-pdf/98/3/349/2139644/349staub.pdf.</p>

	<p>Ron, https://read.dukeupress.edu/agricultural-history/article-pdf/98/3/427/2139591/427ron.pdf.</p> <p>Sheingate, https://read.dukeupress.edu/agricultural-history/article-pdf/98/3/436/2139605/436sheingate.pdf.</p> <p>Phillips, https://read.dukeupress.edu/agricultural-history/article-pdf/98/3/444/2139611/444phillips.pdf.</p> <p>Secchi, https://read.dukeupress.edu/agricultural-history/article-pdf/98/3/462/2139599/462secchi.pdf.</p> <p>Effland, https://read.dukeupress.edu/agricultural-history/article-pdf/98/3/481/2139574/481effland.pdf.</p>
	<p><i>Other Readings (Optional):</i></p> <p>Marion Nestle, <i>Utopian Dream: A New Farm Bill</i>, in <i>Dissent</i> (2016) available at: https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/utopian-dream-a-new-farm-bill</p> <p>Blake Hurst, <i>The Omnivore's Delusion: Against the Agri-Intellectuals</i>, (July 2009) available at: https://www.aei.org/articles/the-omnivores-delusion-against-the-agri-intellectuals/</p> <p>Grunwald, Michael. "Sorry, but This Is the Future of Food." <i>The New York Times</i>. December 13, 2024. https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/13/opinion/food-agriculture-factory-farms-climate-change.html.</p>

Optional Supplemental Readings

- Bosso, Christopher. *Framing the Farm Bill: Interests, Ideology, and the Agricultural Act of 2014* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2017).
<https://kansaspress.ku.edu/9780700624195/>.
- Bosso, Christopher. *Why SNAP Works: A Political History—and Defense—of the Food Stamp Program* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2023).
<https://www.ucpress.edu/books/why-snap-works/hardcover>.
- Brock, Clare R. *Farmed Out: Agricultural Lobbying in a Polarized Congress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024).
<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/farmed-out-9780197683798?cc=us&lang=en&>.
- Coppess, Jonathan. *The Fault Lines of Farm Policy: A Legislative and Political History of the Farm Bill* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), available: <https://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu/nebraska/9781496205124/>.
- Coppess, Jonathan. *Between Soil and Society: Legislative History and Political Development of Farm Bill Conservation Policy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2024), available: <https://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu/nebraska/9781496225146/>.
- Smith, Bobby. *Food Power Politics: The Food Story of the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2023).
<https://uncpress.org/book/9781469675077/food-power-politics/>.
- Winders, Bill. *The Politics of Food Supply: U.S. Agricultural Policy in the World Economy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).
<https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300181869/the-politics-of-food-supply/>.