



Barn Report

A Dairy Keeper Resource

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Dairy Policy Back On Congressional Table

Article by The Cattle Site News Desk

US - When Congress returns to Washington next week for the second session of the 112th Congress, the agriculture committees must begin consideration of the next Farm Bill before the current law expires on September 30, 2012, says the International Dairy Foods Association.

Efforts to short-circuit the process late in 2011 failed, and agriculture policy, including dairy, will be a hot topic over the coming months. There are many paths the Farm Bill could take, and the larger federal budget debate will strongly influence the outcome of the final bill.

Back in the fall, leadership of both the Senate and House agriculture committees recommended that a new Farm Bill be included in the deficit-reduction package being developed by the super committee. House Ag Committee Chair Frank Lucas (R-OK), Ranking Member Collin Peterson (D-MN), Senate Ag Committee Chair Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) and Ranking Member Pat Roberts (R-KS) convened behind closed doors to put together a Farm Bill package that included \$23 billion in spending cuts to agriculture programmers. But Congress pulled the plug on the super committee's efforts before Thanksgiving, and the secret Farm Bill never saw the light of day.

Transparent Process Needed

IDFA certainly supports efforts to get our government's budget in order. Agriculture policy, including dairy, deserves a more transparent process involving committee and floor debates. Even members of the agriculture committees were not provided an opportunity to offer amendments or vote on any of the secret Farm Bill provisions. Going forward, Congress will most likely consider the next Farm Bill under the normal legislative process, allowing more voices to be heard

and a more open debate.

It is clear that future Farm Bill spending will be reduced as part of a government-wide effort to reduce deficit spending. The chairs of the House and Senate agriculture committees may use their agreed upon \$23 billion package as a starting point to begin negotiations for the next Farm Bill, but there will be many opportunities for changes. IDFA learned that the dairy safety-net policies included in the package closely mirror those in Peterson's bill, H.R. 3062, the Dairy Security Act. IDFA and our member companies oppose H.R. 3062 because it includes controversial government-mandated production controls.

If the agriculture committees cannot come to agreement before the current Farm Bill expires, it is quite possible that they will authorize a short term extension of the 2008 Farm Bill. Under an extension, the Farm Bill debate would be pushed back until after the 2012 elections or even into 2013 with the prospect that there may be a new Congress or administration to start over.

Bottom line: When it comes to agriculture policy and the Farm Bill, everything is on the table, including dairy policy. IDFA members must continue to engage in the process to support risk management tools without more government mandates, to oppose any form of supply control and to reform the federal milk pricing system.

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