



**UNIT 3:
FOOD AND POWER**

L.24

**GOVERNMENT
POWER:
THE FARM BILL**

Note to Teachers

The Farm Bill is an extremely complex and wide-ranging bill. Like most subjects addressed in this semester-long curriculum, Lesson 24 is designed as an introduction to a broad topic. It provides a short history of the Farm Bill and an exposure to its importance in shaping our food system.

Goals *In this lesson, students will*

- Students will understand and evaluate the basic structure of government support for agriculture.
- understand that government has supported the move described in Lesson 15: Industrial Agriculture and the production of commodity crops.

Objectives

- Students will draw information from a variety of sources to gain a basic exposure to the Farm Bill.
- Students will evaluate whether the 2014 Farm Bill is a better food bill for Americans than the 2008 Farm Bill was.

Materials

- Computer with Internet access and projector



GOVERNMENT POWER: THE FARM BILL

Please use this margin to notate how to best adapt this curriculum to your students.

I. A brief history

1. Distribute the handout “The Farm Bill” and ask students to read Part I aloud, silently, or in small groups.

Encourage students to listen for the programs covered by the Farm Bill and how they change over time.

As you discuss their responses, you may wish to remind them that only one of the crops receiving government support is typically grown for human food (wheat). Most corn and soy become animal feed or other products.

II. What kind of system does it promote?

1. Show the video: “Turning the Farm Bill into the Food Bill: Ken Cook at TEDxManhattan” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z6T37m4r3yo&t=2s> (14 minutes)
2. As they watch, ask students to listen carefully and jot down a few notes about:
 - what Ken Cook believes are the problems with the 2008 Farm Bill, *and*
 - what he sees as possible solutions
 - Share responses.
3. Analysis: If the Farm Bill isn’t already a “food bill” as Cook suggests, what does he suggest it is?
4. Discuss their answers and highlight key issues

III. The 2014 Farm Bill breakdown

1. Ask students to examine the pie chart on backside of their handout. What do they notice about the breakdown of funds as indicated in the pie chart? How is government using its power?
2. Then read together the bullet points below the chart, to give the pie chart more context.
3. Answer the question at the bottom of the sheet: What would Ken Cook conclude: Is the 2014 Farm Bill a better food bill than the 2008 Farm Bill?

IV. Cooking Lab: Deluxe Tex Mex Salad

The goal of this cooking lab is to prepare a substantive meal on a budget. Almost all of the ingredients of the Tex Mex Salad can be purchased at different price points, as well as substituted or omitted. The recipe also includes a crop generally grown for animal feed: corn in the form of tortilla chips.

See attached Tex Mex Salad recipe.



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DELUXE TEX MEX SALAD

16 students

One recipe should make enough
for everyone to taste.

Equipment List

- Induction burner
- Large skillet
- 16 cutting boards
- 16 knives
- Wooden mixing spoon
- Can opener
- 1 teaspoon measure
- Strainer
- 5 small bowls
- 2 medium bowls
- Serving plate and spoon

IF COOKING RICE:

- Induction burner
- Pot with lid
- Wooden mixing spoon
- 1 cup dry measure
- 2 cup liquid measure

Food Items

- Olive oil
- Green bell pepper
- Red bell pepper
- 2 yellow onions
- Jar of salsa
- Kidney beans
- Black beans
- Frozen corn
- Rice
- Lettuce
- Tortilla chips
- Cheese



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DELUXE TEX MEX SALAD

YIELD: 16 taste-sized servings

Ingredients

- 2 teaspoons olive oil
- 1 medium green bell pepper, seeded and cut in small, thin strips
- 1 medium red bell pepper, seeded and cut in small, thin strips
- 2 yellow onions, halved and thinly sliced
- 15 ounce can of kidney beans, drained and rinsed
- 15 ounce can of black beans, drained and rinsed
- 2, 10 ounce bags of frozen sweet corn
- 3 cups cooked rice
- 16 ounce jar of salsa
- 6 cups shredded lettuce
- 10.5 ounce bag of baked tortilla chips
- 1 ½ cups shredded cheddar or Mexican blend cheese

Directions

1. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add peppers and onions and cook until tender but still crisp.
2. Add beans, corn, rice and salsa. Cook thoroughly.
3. To serve, place 1 cup of lettuce on plate and surround with tortilla chips. Top with warm vegetable mixture and cheese.



GOVERNMENT POWER: THE FARM BILL

KATHLEEN MASTERSON
from
THE FARM BILL: FROM CHARITABLE START TO PRIME BUDGET TARGET
NPR.org, 26 September 2011.

I. A Short History

So how did the government get in the business of supporting farmers, anyway? During the Great Depression, most people lived in rural areas, and many families literally risked losing the farm. That's because farmers were producing more food than people were buying, so prices were too low for many to keep up their mortgage payments.

"So attacking poverty on farms was really a national priority for attacking poverty in the U.S.," says Bruce Babcock, the director of the Center for Agricultural and Rural Development at Iowa State University.



Use the space below to note key ideas, themes, or surprising takeaways from the reading.

So as part of FDR's New Deal, Congress passed the Agriculture Adjustment Act [AAA] in 1933. Essentially, the law paid farmers to not grow food on a certain percentage of their land to reduce the market glut. It also called for the government to buy excess grain from farmers, which it could later release on the market if bad weather affected yields.

Five years later, the Congress turned the AAA and related laws into more permanent legislation, and the farm bill as we know it was born. Since the 1938 legislation, Congress has been required to update the farm bill every five years (well, they're not always on time).

Most of the subsidies go to corn, wheat, cotton and soybean farmers—fruits and vegetables as well as livestock (other than dairy) are largely left out. . .

From 1933 to 1996, the farm bill pretty much ran this way: The government bought and stored massive amounts of grain, controlling its release on the market to prop up prices, and the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture dictated to farmers yearly how much of their land they needed to lie fallow to get paid.

[After an experiment in letting the free market drive farm incomes beginning in 1996], Congress backtracked and pushed through several new farm programs, including the now-controversial direct payments, which are pretty much what they sound like. Regardless of market conditions, the government writes grain farmers support checks; the amount of the subsidy is based on farmers' historical yields and acreage (from the 1980s). The idea was that government would no longer link eligibility for subsidies to planting certain crops, but would still help support farmers suffering from low prices in the late 90s. . .

Also in the 1996 bill, the government made farmers enroll in heavily-subsidized crop insurance programs in order to be eligible for farm program payments. Enrollment took off, and crop insurance subsidies now rival direct payments in terms of spending.



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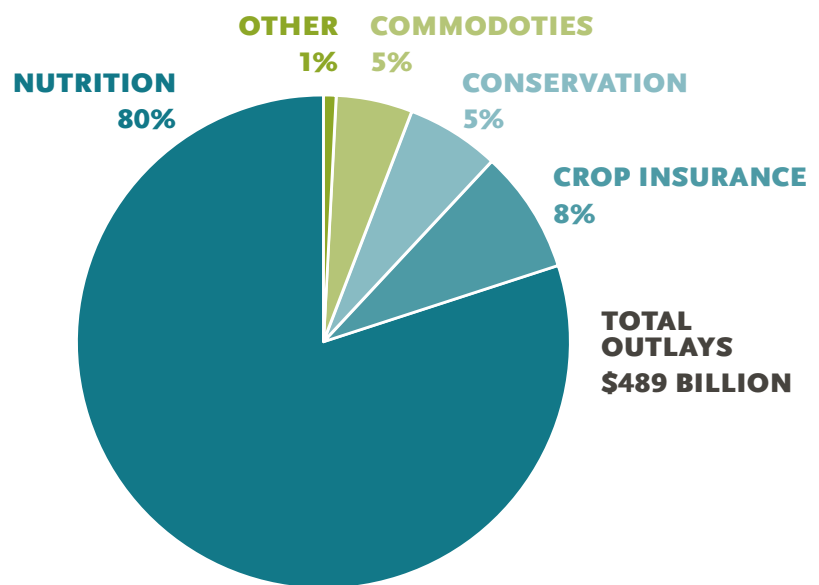
A few years after the Freedom To Farm Act, the government paid record subsidies to American farmers—over \$20B annually from 1999-2001.

A major criticism has been that the wealthiest farmers get the most in subsidies. In fact, according to the Environmental Working Group's crunch of USDA numbers, between 1995 and 2010, 10 percent of farmers who received subsidies took home three-quarters of farm subsidy dollars. About 62 percent of American farmers don't receive any subsidies at all, according to 2007 data.

II. Farm Bill Allocation Graph

Congress is currently working on the 2018 Farm Bill; we are currently operating under the 2014 Farm Bill.

Projected outlays under the 2014 Farm Act, 2014-2018



Source: USDA Economic Research Service using data from Congressional Budget Office, Cost Estimates for the Agricultural Act of 2014, Jan 2014.

III. A few updates

Since 2014, those estimated costs now equal \$956 billion overall.

In the 2014 Farm Bill, government funding includes:

- \$756 billion for nutrition. This sum represents an overall cut in benefits, with specific cuts to families in 17 states, and legislation to prevent college students, lottery winners and undocumented immigrants from receiving SNAP [nutrition] benefits.
- \$44 billion for subsidies for growing commodity crops, particularly corn, wheat, soybean, cotton, rice, peanut, and dairy, and \$90 billion on crop insurance. These two benefits go disproportionately to wealthy farmers with very large farms. While the form of the benefits has evolved to include insurance and not just subsidies, the amount of support for wealthy farmers generally has not.



