

## US Senate approves US\$955bn farm bill

WASHINGTON, USA: The US Senate approved a sweeping, nearly US\$1trn farm bill that sets out agriculture policy for the next five years, including expansion of crop insurance and reduction of food stamps.



The bill, which allocates some US\$955bn to nutrition and conservation programmes, commodities and other agriculture spending, was passed by 66 to 27 votes. It now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration.

The bill slashes some US\$24bn from the federal deficit compared with the previous farm bill, a consideration Democrats hope will beef up the likelihood of passage through the Republican-led House where members have expressed intent to cut even more.

Agriculture is among the biggest US industries, accounting for at least 16m jobs, and Senator Debbie Stabenow of Michigan, chairman of the Agriculture Committee, has called passing the farm bill this year a top priority.

"It's been a long road," she said on the Senate floor, referring to how last year's farm bill passed by the Senate was not taken up by the Republican-controlled House, causing the Senate version to expire at the end of 2012.

"I'm very optimistic we will get this done" and on to President Barack Obama's desk for his signature.

### 'This year might be different'

Stabenow accused House Republicans of having "walked away from rural America last year," but "this year it looks like it's going to be different."

House Speaker John Boehner suggested as much in a statement saying the House will begin "vigorous and open debate" on its version of the farm bill later this month.

But Boehner hinted at a potential showdown, particularly over dairy provisions from last year that Boehner opposes, but that were kept in the 2013 bill.

"I oppose those provisions and will support efforts on the House floor to change them appropriately," he said, but he urged House members to come forward with possible solutions.

"Let's have the debate, and let's vote," Boehner said.

By far the largest part of the bill, some US\$760.5bn over 10 years, the chunk of time over which the costs are calculated, addresses nutritional programmes including food stamps, which the legislation cuts by some US\$4bn.

House lawmakers have called for even deeper cuts in the food stamp programme as part of their goal of slashing a further US\$15bn from the overall bill.

It also marks a major transition from direct payments to farmers, a decades-old policy that helps shield growers from risk,

a market-based crop insurance system.

The new crop insurance plan would cost US\$89bn over 10 years.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge

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