

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Agriculture
Washington, DC 20515

January 3, 2013

The Honorable Eric Cantor
Majority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Cantor:

Given what occurred in the last Congress, I feel it is necessary to ask if, as Majority Leader, you will honor “regular order” and provide time to consider a new, five-year farm bill approved by the House Agriculture Committee during the 113th Congress.

Despite a day-long mark-up, where almost 60 amendments were offered, considered and either adopted or rejected; despite having the support of myself, the Chairman of the Agriculture Committee and a majority of Committee Democrats and Republicans; despite following the practice of regular order as laid out for us, the Republican Leadership was nothing but a stumbling block in our quest to let the House “work its will” on a new five-year farm bill during the last Congress.

As you well know, the Republican Leadership first stepped in and asked the Chairman and me to delay our mark-up, saying they wanted to consider the agriculture appropriations bill on the floor first. The Committee held off its mark-up, while the Leadership ultimately did not bring the appropriations bill to floor. This delayed the Committee’s work by two weeks. Although the Committee approved a five-year farm bill, the Republican Leadership chose to instead put forward a one-year farm bill extension, which ultimately was not considered because of lack of support. In late October you said, “I am committed to bringing the issue to the floor...” but that never happened.

Given the Republican Leadership’s long-standing opposition to farm programs and previous farm bills, it was no surprise that there were provisions in the bill that you could not support. But instead of allowing those objections to be aired in an open debate and letting the House work its will, the Republican Leadership bottled up the Committee’s farm bill and drafted alternatives in the Speaker’s and Majority Leader’s offices, bypassing both the Chairman and members of the Agriculture Committee and making a mockery of regular order. I could not believe the level of disrespect the Republican Leadership team showed the Committee.

I heard Leadership’s excuses: that the votes were not there to pass the bill. That is patently false. The Leadership team never conducted a whip count, never asking members whether they would vote for or against the Committee package. I brought together members from both parties to conduct a count, and we found enough votes to pass it.

We now need to look at where we go from here. Let me outline some points as I see it:

- Given the behavior of the Republican Leadership and its treatment of the House Agriculture Committee in the previous Congress, I believe it is only fair for me to ask for a written commitment that your Leadership team will find floor time during this Congress if the Committee marks-up a new five year farm bill. I would also expect it should not take more than a month for your team to determine the appropriate time for floor consideration of the new farm bill and to announce that date publicly.
- Given the Republican Leadership's objections to farm programs in general, I would not expect your team to bear responsibility for finding the votes to pass the Committee's farm bill; that would fall upon the Committee. I also understand and can accept that you and your Leadership team would likely want such a bill to come up under an open process, allowing for multiple amendments. I would ask that you let the House "work its will" even if you have personal objections to the outcome. The 2008 Farm Bill was one of the last bills enacted under regular order, where then-Speaker Pelosi formally appointed conferees and allowed me to open the conference committee process to the public. I hope you will be willing to make the same commitment.
- At this point, however, I see no reason why the House Agriculture Committee should undertake the fool's errand to craft another long-term farm bill if the Republican Leadership refuses to give any assurances that our bipartisan work will be considered. You and your Leadership team seem very content with simply extending the 2008 Farm Bill year after year without making any effort at reform, achieving savings and efficiencies, or improving the farm safety net for rural America. If that is your goal, I will certainly accommodate you.

Once the other remaining Democratic members of the House Agriculture Committee have been appointed, you can expect a similar letter asking for a similar commitment. I look forward to hearing from you in the coming days.

Sincerely,



Collin C. Peterson
Ranking Member