

Union Calendar No. 310

106TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 852

[Report No. 106-565]

To require the Department of Agriculture to establish an electronic filing and retrieval system to enable the public to file all required paperwork electronically with the Department and to have access to public information on farm programs, quarterly trade, economic, and production reports, and other similar information.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 25, 1999

Mr. LAHOOD introduced the following bill; which was referred to the
Committee on Agriculture

APRIL 10, 2000

Additional sponsors: Mr. SHOWS, Mr. ISTOOK, Mr. COOKSEY, Mr. LEWIS of Kentucky, Mr. HOSTETTLER, Mr. ADERHOLT, Mr. HINCHEY, Mr. ENGLISH, Mr. WYNN, Mr. HASTINGS of Washington, Mr. EWING, Mr. BEREUTER, Mr. QUINN, Mr. BROWN of California, Mr. CHAMBLISS, Mr. MOORE, Mr. COBURN, Mr. POMBO, Mr. PHELPS, Mr. SMITH of Washington, Mr. EVANS, Mr. SHIMKUS, Mr. THUNE, Mr. HOBSON, Mr. WELLER, Mr. GREEN of Wisconsin, Mr. MCHUGH, Mr. GUTIERREZ, Mr. ROEMER, Mr. GANSKE, Mr. GARY MILLER of California, Mr. EHLERS, Mr. PASTOR, Mr. CANADY of Florida, Mr. CRANE, Ms. DANNER, Mr. INSLEE, Mr. GILMAN, Mr. SAXTON, Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi, Mr. DAVIS of Illinois, Mrs. EMERSON, Mr. KOLBE, Mr. COOK, Mr. NETHERCUTT, Mr. BOUCHER, Mr. LUCAS of Kentucky, Mr. JOHN, Mr. BARRETT of Nebraska, Mr. MINGE, and Mr. SMITH of Texas

APRIL 10, 2000

Reported with amendments, committed to the Committee of the Whole House
on the State of the Union, and ordered to be printed

[Strike out all after the enacting clause and insert the part printed in *italic*]

A BILL

To require the Department of Agriculture to establish an electronic filing and retrieval system to enable the public to file all required paperwork electronically with the Department and to have access to public information on farm programs, quarterly trade, economic, and production reports, and other similar information.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
 2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Freedom to E-File
 5 Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. ELECTRONIC FILING AND RETRIEVAL.**

7 (a) **IN GENERAL.**—Not later than 180 days after the
 8 date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Agriculture
 9 shall establish an electronic filing and retrieval system to
 10 enable the public to file all required paperwork electroni-
 11 cally with the Department of Agriculture and to have ac-
 12 cess to public information on farm programs, quarterly
 13 trade, economic, and production reports, and other similar
 14 information.

15 (b) **PROGRESS REPORTS.**—Not later than 90 days
 16 after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall

1 report to Congress the progress made toward imple-
 2 menting subsection (a).

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 *This Act may be cited as the “Freedom to E-File Act”.*

5 **SEC. 2. ELECTRONIC FILING AND RETRIEVAL.**

6 *(a) ESTABLISHMENT OF INTERNET-BASED SYSTEM.—*

7 *The Secretary of Agriculture shall establish an electronic*
 8 *filing and retrieval system that uses the telecommunications*
 9 *medium known as the Internet to enable farmers and other*
 10 *persons—*

11 *(1) to file electronically all paperwork required*
 12 *by the agencies of the Department of Agriculture spec-*
 13 *ified in subsection (b); and*

14 *(2) to have access electronically to information,*
 15 *readily available to the public in published form, re-*
 16 *garding farm programs, quarterly trade, economic,*
 17 *and production reports, price and supply informa-*
 18 *tion, and other similar information related to produc-*
 19 *tion agriculture.*

20 *(b) COVERED AGENCIES.—Subsection (a) shall apply*
 21 *to the following agencies of the Department of Agriculture:*

22 *(1) The Farm Service Agency.*

23 *(2) The Risk Management Agency.*

24 *(3) The Natural Resources Conservation Service.*

1 (4) *The rural development components of the De-*
2 *partment included in the Secretary's service center*
3 *initiative regarding State and field office collocation*
4 *implemented pursuant to section 215 of the Depart-*
5 *ment of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994 (7*
6 *U.S.C. 6915).*

7 (c) *TIME-TABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION.*—*Not later*
8 *than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act,*
9 *the Secretary shall—*

10 (1) *to the maximum extent practicable, complete*
11 *the establishment of the electronic filing and retrieval*
12 *system required by subsection (a) to the extent nec-*
13 *essary to permit the electronic information access re-*
14 *quired by paragraph (2) of such subsection;*

15 (2) *initiate implementation of the electronic fil-*
16 *ing required by paragraph (1) of such subsection by*
17 *allowing farmers and other persons to download*
18 *forms from the Internet and submit completed forms*
19 *via facsimile, mail, or related means; and*

20 (3) *modify forms used by the agencies specified*
21 *in subsection (b) into a more user-friendly format,*
22 *with self-help guidance materials.*

23 (d) *INTEROPERABILITY.*—*In carrying out this section,*
24 *the Secretary shall ensure that the agencies specified in sub-*
25 *section (b)—*

1 (1) use computer hardware and software that is
 2 compatible among the agencies and will operate in a
 3 common computing environment; and

4 (2) develop common Internet user-interface loca-
 5 tions and applications to consolidate the agencies'
 6 news, information, and program materials.

7 (e) **COMPLETION OF IMPLEMENTATION.**—Not later
 8 than two years after the date of the enactment of this Act,
 9 the Secretary shall complete the establishment of the elec-
 10 tronic filing and retrieval system required by subsection (a)
 11 to permit the electronic filing required by paragraph (1)
 12 of such subsection.

13 (f) **PROGRESS REPORT.**—Not later than 180 days after
 14 the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall
 15 submit to Congress a report describing the progress made
 16 toward establishing the electronic filing and retrieval sys-
 17 tem required by subsection (a).

18 **SEC. 3. AVAILABILITY OF AGENCY INFORMATION TECH-**
 19 **NOLOGY FUNDS.**

20 (a) **RESERVATION OF FUNDS.**—From funds made
 21 available for each agency of the Department of Agriculture
 22 specified in section 2(b) for information technology or infor-
 23 mation resource management, the Secretary of Agriculture
 24 shall reserve an amount equal to not more than the fol-
 25 lowing:

1 (1) *For fiscal year 2001, \$3,000,000.*

2 (2) *For each subsequent fiscal year, \$2,000,000.*

3 (b) *TIME FOR RESERVATION.—The Secretary shall no-*
 4 *tify Congress of the amount to be reserved under subsection*
 5 *(a) for a fiscal year not later than December 1 of that fiscal*
 6 *year.*

7 (c) *USE OF FUNDS.—Funds reserved under subsection*
 8 *(a) shall be used to establish the electronic filing and re-*
 9 *trieval system required by section 2(a). Once the system is*
 10 *established and operational, reserved amounts shall be used*
 11 *for maintenance and improvement of the system.*

12 (d) *RETURN OF FUNDS.—Funds reserved under sub-*
 13 *section (a) and unobligated at the end of the fiscal year*
 14 *shall be returned to the agency from which the funds were*
 15 *reserved, and such funds shall remain available until ex-*
 16 *pended.*

Amend the title so as to read: “A bill to require the Secretary of Agriculture to establish an electronic filing and retrieval system to enable farmers and other persons to file paperwork electronically with selected agencies of the Department of Agriculture and to access public information regarding the programs administered by these agencies.”.

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