

I will seek to place our letters on H.R. 6219 into the Congressional Record during floor consideration of the bill. I appreciate your cooperation regarding this legislation and look forward to continuing to work together as this measure moves through the legislative process.

Sincerely,

EDWARD R. ROYCE,
Chairman.

GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks on H.R. 6219.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Florida?

There was no objection.

REAFFIRMING THE COMMITMENT OF THE UNITED STATES TO PROMOTE FREE, FAIR, TRANSPARENT AND CREDIBLE ELECTIONS IN BANGLADESH

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Foreign Affairs be discharged from further consideration of H. Res. 1169, and ask for its immediate consideration in the House.

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Florida?

There was no objection.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

H. RES. 1169

Whereas Bangladesh achieved independence in 1971 and established a secular democratic state, which is home to Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, and atheists;

Whereas Bangladesh is the eighth most populous country with nearly 160,000,000 people;

Whereas according to the United States Agency for International Development maternal and child mortality rates in Bangladesh have declined by more than 60 percent, production of rice has tripled, and growth in gross domestic product has averaged more than 6 percent annually for over a decade;

Whereas Bangladesh has fulfilled the criteria to initiate graduation from the United Nations "Least Developed Country" status and could become a middle-income country within the next 3 years;

Whereas in 2017, the generous people of Bangladesh welcomed more than 700,000 Rohingya refugees following the Burmese military and security force's crimes against humanity and genocide against the Rohingya in Northern Rakhine State;

Whereas in recent years, Bangladesh's democratic system has faced challenges, including political violence, environmental strain, Islamist militancy, a refugee crisis, and challenges to freedom of speech and press;

Whereas free, fair, transparent, and credible elections are the cornerstone of every democracy;

Whereas legitimate elections that respect fundamental freedoms are characterized by transparency, accountability, security, and accessibility for all voters;

Whereas strong democracies worldwide make for better trading partners, provide new market opportunities, improve global health outcomes, and promote economic freedom and regional security;

Whereas attacks on democracy and democratic institutions undermine the sacrifices of the Bangladeshi people and the country's commitment to human rights and the rule of law;

Whereas one of Bangladesh's main political parties boycotted the 2014 general election due to concerns about the impartiality of the electoral process;

Whereas Bangladesh is scheduled to hold general elections on December 30, 2018;

Whereas democratic stability, regional security, and economic prosperity in Bangladesh and South Asia are vital to the national security interests of the United States;

Whereas the United States-Bangladesh relationship is built on a foundation of shared values and cooperation on issues including economic growth and development, labor rights, peacekeeping, counterterrorism, and the environment and climate;

Whereas the United States should more actively engage with the Government of Bangladesh with respect to their shared interests in safeguarding human rights, religious freedom, and secular democracy in Bangladesh, while preventing the growth of religious extremism and militancy; and

Whereas repeated attacks on religious minorities, expanding religious intolerance, and growing destabilization caused by radical groups undermine United States economic and strategic interests in Bangladesh: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the House of Representatives—

(1) reaffirms the commitment of the United States to promote free, fair, transparent and credible elections in Bangladesh;

(2) calls on the Government of Bangladesh to respect the freedom of speech and of the press and to heed the Bangladesh Election Commission's request to ensure security for minorities and maintain communal harmony for a peaceful election;

(3) urges political leaders and judicial authorities in Bangladesh to respect the will of voters and ensure that all Bangladeshis will be able to participate freely in the upcoming elections, and that the elections will be impartial and inclusive; and

(4) commends the government and people of Bangladesh for their generosity in hosting Rohingya refugees despite the hardships associated with responding to this man-made humanitarian disaster created by the Burmese military and security force's crimes against humanity and genocide against the Rohingya in Northern Rakhine State.

The resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 2, AGRICULTURE AND NUTRITION ACT OF 2018

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. CONAWAY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the conference report to accompany H.R. 2.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Texas?

There was no objection.

Mr. CONAWAY. Mr. Speaker, pursuant to House Resolution 1176, I call up

the conference report on the bill (H.R. 2) to provide for the reform and continuation of agricultural and other programs of the Department of Agriculture through fiscal year 2023, and for other purpose, and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 1176, the conference report is considered read.

(For conference report and statement, see proceedings of the House of December 10, 2018, Book II at page H9823.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Texas (Mr. CONAWAY) and the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. PETERSON) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas.

Mr. CONAWAY. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of the conference report to H.R. 2, the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018.

It is fitting that the House today consider that farm bill because, 28 years ago, another proud Texan, President George H.W. Bush, signed into law the 1990 farm bill.

For the first time since 1990, Congress is poised to pass a new farm bill in the same year that the legislation was first introduced.

In many ways, the 1990 farm bill laid the groundwork for today's U.S. farm policy. The U.S. farm policy is no longer the old command and control policies of the New Deal, but, rather, a market-oriented, risk management approach that helps America's farmers and ranchers survive natural disasters and the predatory trade practices of foreign countries like China.

Our Nation's farmers and ranchers are the very best in the world, but they cannot compete alone against a sea of high and rising foreign subsidies, tariffs, and nontariff trade barriers, nor can they survive alone in the face of record droughts, hurricanes, wildfires, and other natural disasters. That is why we have a farm bill.

Mr. Speaker, not since the early 2000s has a farm bill been more desperately needed than it is today. Our farmers and ranchers are going through a very difficult recession right now. Net farm income is down 50 percent from where it stood just 5 years ago, the largest drop since the Great Depression. And farm bankruptcies are more up by more than 30 percent.

We have all seen the devastation of recent wildfires and hurricanes. Less noticed, but no less destructive, is the severe drought that has gripped many parts of the country, perhaps none more so than the one I get to represent.

Even less noticed is the rampant cheating going on in the global trade that hurts our farmers and ranchers every single day. China recently oversubsidized just three crops by more than \$100 billion in a single year.

Put in perspective, China spent more on excess illegal subsidies in a year than the entire U.S. safety net covering all commodities will cost in roughly two farm bills. That is why passage of this farm bill is so important.

The farm bill is never easy to pass. The needs of our farmers and ranchers are greater than they have ever been in a long time, but we have operated under a flat budget.

For my colleagues who are concerned about the deficit spending, please note that this farm bill is budget neutral. This follows on the heels of the 2014 farm bill that has come in significantly under budget also.

Mr. Speaker, here are some specifics of the 2018 farm bill:

First, the farm bill honors the request of nearly every farmer and rancher that we do no harm to Federal crop insurance.

Second, we strengthen the farm bill safety net for all farmers and ranchers. Believe it or not, there was actually pressure from some in the other Chamber to cut the farm safety net at a time when the whole point of a farm bill is to help our farm and ranch families.

Third, we strengthened key conservation initiatives, especially the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. These highly successful conservation initiatives serve as a prime example of how voluntary, incentive-based conservation beats burdensome, arbitrary, and costly Washington regulations every single time.

Fourth, we honored the requests of farmers and ranchers to fully fund our trade promotion initiatives, which could not be more important than they are right now. This includes fully funding the Market Access Program and the Foreign Market Development Program.

We also succeeded in maintaining the vital link between America's farmers and ranchers and U.S. food aid by preserving the in-kind food assistance to our neighbors in need from around the world.

Fifth, we make some extremely important investments elsewhere in this farm bill: We increase individual Farm Service Agency loan limits, which have not been updated in 16 years; we increase agriculture research funding at a time when we are dangerously lagging behind China.

We also provide Secretary Perdue with the tools he requested to effectively combat the opioid epidemic and also to expand high-quality broadband service in all of rural America.

We increase investment in new crop uses and in specialty crops, including fruits and vegetables, and we increase investments in the Nation's livestock sector by strengthening our Nation's animal disease prevention and management efforts, including the stockpiling of foot-and-mouth disease vaccine.

Finally, it is fair to say that there has been philosophical differences in this conference committee. Achieving

commonsense SNAP reforms, preventing wildfires, and providing regulatory relief are just three of the examples.

Despite this, we made commonsense reforms and improved the program integrity and work requirements under SNAP, including involving Governors in the work requirement waivers so that there is political accountability and by reducing State allowances for able-bodied adults without dependents.

We required States to adopt case management practices to help move SNAP beneficiaries from welfare to work, and we eliminate \$480 million in bonuses we pay to States for simply doing their jobs. These and other reforms will build on the success we have had in moving more than 9 million people off of SNAP rolls and into the workforce over the past 5 years.

The farm bill will also reduce the forest fuel loads to reduce the incidence and intensity of wildfires. This is achieved by expanding the insect and disease categorical exclusion to remove hazardous fuel loads and empowering State, local, and Tribal authorities to remove timber.

Nobody deserves more credit for working to improve our Nation's forest management than my friend BRUCE WESTERMAN from Arkansas, whom I am proud to have as a signatory on this conference report.

These reforms are important, and they are only a start in what we need to be done. Ultimately, we had to make a decision between making as many inroads on reform in these areas as we could or allow farmers and ranchers to be held hostage. Faced with that choice, I chose the route of getting this farm bill done.

We made important inroads wherever we could on these reforms. We worked to provide the strongest safety net possible for our Nation's farmers and ranchers.

In closing, I thank Ranking Member PETERSON and our counterparts in the other Chamber for bringing this conference report to final consideration. I extend my sincere gratitude to President Trump and Secretary Perdue for their unwavering support of our farmers and ranchers, and I greatly appreciate the support and hard work of House leadership and members of my Conference, especially my fellow conferees, for all they have done to stand by rural America and those families who feed and clothe us.

For the sake of rural America and our struggling farmers and ranchers, I urge my colleagues to support this farm bill so the President can sign this measure into law.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. PETERSON. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the conference report on H.R. 2, the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018. The conference report we are considering today would reauthorize farm bill programs for 5 years.

The 2014 farm bill expired on September 30, and while the road to get here has had a few bumps along the way, I am glad that we are finally able to reach an agreement, and now it is time to get this done.

During a time when rural America is facing a downturn in the farm economy and a trade war that is taking a toll on crop, livestock, and dairy producers from coast to coast, this bill will provide needed certainty to farmers and ranchers.

The bill continues a variety of commodity, conservation, trade, nutrition, credit, rural development, research, energy, and specialty crop programs. It also provides permanent mandatory funding for several of the programs that first got mandatory funding in the 2008 farm bill when I was last chairman. These include the Local Food and Farmers Market Promotion Program, the Value-Added Producer Grant Program, the BFRDP, Organic Research, and the Section 2501 Outreach Program.

One of the most important pieces in this bill, however, is the improvement that it makes for our dairy farmers. The economic downturn in farm country has hit the dairy industry probably the hardest of all, and in my home State of Minnesota and neighboring Wisconsin, an average of two dairies are going out of business every day. The provisions in this bill will provide expanded, affordable coverage options and more flexibility for dairy farmers, and I am proud to put my name on this program.

We are also providing \$300 million in mandatory funding for animal disease programs at a time when our U.S. livestock industry is facing a continued danger from unchecked threats from different areas. That money will go to increasing our ability to prevent and respond to animal pests and diseases that harm our animals and threaten the viability of our livestock operations.

There are folks who would have liked to have seen different directions taken on several issues in this bill, but this is a conference report where the House and Senate figure out where the common ground is.

I am very appreciative of the hard work of the majority and its staff, as well as my staff under the direction of Anne Simmons and Troy Phillips. My staff put their whole selves into this bill, and I want to thank and commend them: Lisa Shelton, Keith Jones, Prescott Martin, Katie Zenk, Patrick Delaney, and special thanks to my former staffers who worked on the bill, Mary Knigge, Liz Friedlander, and Evan Jurkovich, and to Clark Ogilvie, who missed the farm bill so much that he came to the committee to help us finish it.

Thank you also to Patti Ross in the leader's office and Tom Mahr in the whip's office for their help, and all the folks at USDA and CBO for their hard work in getting us to this point; also,

the House and Senate legislative counsels who helped us put this bill together.

So I think we have a good bill, a good compromise. I would encourage my colleagues to support this effort, and I look forward to continuing the discussion on many of these issues into the next Congress.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. CONAWAY. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. LUCAS), the former chairman of the committee and current chairman of the Subcommittee on Conservation and Forestry.

Mr. LUCAS. Mr. Speaker, I thank our ranking member and our chairman. When you consider what it takes to pass a farm bill, when you consider how difficult the challenges are, think of the last three in total, Chairman PETERSON had to overcome two Presidential vetoes to get the bill on the books, and I supported him.

In the 2014 farm bill, it took my friends here and me 2½ years to get a farm bill on the books. And now, Chairman CONAWAY, he shouldn't have had to go through some of the challenges that Collin and I went through, but he did it, and he did it for the best interests of America.

But what is a farm bill all about? Set the nuances of various policies aside, it is to make sure that we have the safety net to enable us, in this country, to raise the food and fiber we need at an affordable, safe, and cost-effective rate to meet our needs and the world's needs.

□ 1500

And what is the other part of the farm bill? It is making sure our fellow citizens who have difficulty in overcoming their challenges have access to enough of those calories.

Plain and simple, that is what farm bills have been about since 1933, making sure we all eat cheap, well, and safe.

But they have gotten harder and harder because the tendency of this body is for some folks on one side of the room to press for a particular perspective, and other folks on the other side of the room to press for the diametrically opposite perspective.

But ultimately, on the Agriculture Committee, under the leadership of these fine gentlemen and their wonderful staffs and all of our colleagues on the committee, we still do the right thing. We do policy every 5 years that works. We do policy that meets the needs of our fellow citizens and, for that matter, helps make sure the world has enough to eat.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Ranking Member. Let's pass this bill with the overwhelming intensity it deserves, because that is what our neighbors back home deserve.

Mr. PETERSON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. DAVID SCOTT), one of our subcommittee ranking members.

Mr. DAVID SCOTT of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, this is a great farm bill. There is so much in it, so many great things. But in this farm bill is perhaps the absolute best example of bipartisanship at its best, to have Democrats and Republicans working together to give \$80 million to African American, 1890s land grant colleges and universities.

I just want to say a big thank you. I thank our Ranking Member PETERSON. And I thank Mike Conaway, who started with me on this journey. God bless you, Mike. Thank you so much for your help.

I thank our friends over on the Senate side. I thank Senator DAVID PERDUE, who took the reins over there and helped put the money back in. I also thank Senator ROBERTS, the chairman of the Senate committee.

I thank my staffer, Ashley Smith, my legislative director who worked night and day with me on this bill.

And I thank God Almighty. Mr. Speaker, God had His hand in this, to pull Democrats and Republicans together, to give \$80 million to badly needed African American land grant colleges and universities. Only God could pull this together, and we thank God for this blessing and for touching the hearts and the souls and the spirits of all of my colleagues who will vote for this historic bill.

I thank, also, the staff of the Senate Agriculture Committee, as well as the House Agriculture Committee. Thank you all for the work that you all did in this bill. I thank you for all the people in America who are grateful for this, but especially the African American community thanks you for opening up these opportunities for their light to shine as well.

Mr. CONAWAY. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. AUSTIN SCOTT).

Mr. AUSTIN SCOTT of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, first, I want to thank Chairman CONAWAY and Ranking Member PETERSON for their leadership during this process.

I rise today to urge my colleagues to support the conference report to the 2018 farm bill to provide the first major reforms of our Nation's agriculture policy in nearly 5 years.

For the last several years, Members of both sides of the aisle have worked to make sure that our Nation's primary agricultural policy works for American producers.

This year, I was honored to, once again, be chosen to serve on the farm bill conference committee to fight for the good people of middle and south Georgia who dedicate their lives to agriculture. I am confident that this bill delivers the reforms that our farmers and industry stakeholders desperately need to keep our producers in rural communities growing and innovating for the 21st century.

This bill strengthens the farm safety net and provides certainty and flexibility that our producers need. It also

ensures that our farmers can provide the food, nutrition, and fiber, not only for America, but the rest of the world.

In this legislation, we have laid the groundwork for expanding quality broadband access to rural America by giving the USDA the tools and resources to bridge the digital divide that is leaving millions of rural Americans behind and hindering our communities from thriving.

I am very glad that two amendments that I offered were included in the final agreement, which will bring modernization and accountability to broadband services and spur broadband infrastructure investment in rural America. Bridging the digital divide is something I have been fighting for, for years now, and I look forward to seeing the growth in network service and infrastructure development through the provisions of this bill.

In this conference report, we also found some common ground to make improvements to SNAP. I strongly urge my colleagues to support this conference report.

Mr. PETERSON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. FUDGE), one of our subcommittee ranking members.

Ms. FUDGE. Mr. Speaker, let me begin by thanking my good friend and the ranking member, COLLIN PETERSON, as well as my fellow conferees and the staff for their leadership in negotiating this conference report.

The farm bill conference report is a good bill. It is not a perfect bill, but certainly worthy of our support. I am pleased Members on both sides of the aisle and across the Chamber were able to reach consensus on how to show the American people that Congress can work together.

This agreement protects SNAP by rejecting proposals in the House farm bill that would have severely weakened the program and taken food assistance away from nearly 2 million people.

This agreement increases access to healthy foods in underserved communities and takes steps to tackle food waste, which we know is a major problem.

This agreement builds new opportunities to improve soil health and water quality in the Great Lakes.

This agreement provides beginning and minority farmers and ranchers additional tools and resources needed to own and operate successful businesses.

This agreement authorizes \$350 million per year for rural broadband coverage.

This agreement expands investment in low-income, urban, and rural communities.

Finally, this agreement provides certainty and sound agricultural policies for America's producers and consumers. I encourage my colleagues to join me and vote "yes" on the final conference report.

Mr. CONAWAY. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. COMER).

Mr. COMER. Mr. Speaker, it has been a long road of debate to reach an agreement on the 2018 farm bill. This bill benefits all of rural America, our farmers, producers, and consumers. The agreement we have reached on this year's bill includes many important provisions that will help farm country during tough economic times, fully protecting crop insurance and providing certainty to farmers.

I am particularly glad to see industrial hemp de-scheduled from the controlled substances list, a key provision I worked with Leader MCCONNELL on to ensure unnecessary government restrictions are lifted from this valuable agricultural commodity.

I thank Leader MCCONNELL for his collaboration and attention to legalizing industrial hemp, and I appreciate all of my colleagues who supported this issue and helped bring it to the table.

I was proud to represent the interests of Kentucky farmers during this process, and I look forward to a new year of growth and prosperity for farmers and producers across rural America.

Mr. PETERSON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. COSTA), another one of our subcommittee ranking members.

Mr. COSTA. Mr. Speaker, I thank my good friend, Mr. PETERSON, for yielding the time, and I thank him for his work, along with Chairman CONAWAY. And I thank the committee staffs on both sides who have worked so hard and diligently over the last year.

Mr. Speaker, as a member of the farm conference committee, I am proud to support this bipartisan farm bill.

As a third generation farmer, I have the honor and the privilege of representing one of the largest and most diverse agricultural regions in the country and in the world. California grows about half of our Nation's fruits and vegetables, the largest ag State in the Nation. We are number one in dairy producing, number one in citrus production, grapes and wine products. We are also the largest producer of tree nuts in the world. With over 300 crops, the list goes on and on and on.

We are truly blessed in California, so this agricultural legislation is so important.

The dairy title, the changes made in it are very helpful. With increased research funding, risk management tools like crop insurance, and trade promotion programs, this bill is not only good for the San Joaquin Valley that I represent in California, but the entire Nation.

So we must understand that the conservation programs are also an improvement to help with groundwater sustainability and air quality, which are critical in California. The forest management improvements will make a difference in Western States like California, where we have had horrific and devastating forest fires.

The vital SNAP benefits are maintained, and voluntary employment and training programs that I fought for are

strengthened. The 10 pilot projects in the 10 States, I find, will provide better ways for us to get people on their feet who are in need.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I support this farm bill, and I urge my colleagues to do the same. It is a good work product. It is good on behalf of American agriculture and all of the interests that put, every day, America's food on America's dinner table.

Mr. CONAWAY. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. SMITH), a former member of the Agriculture Committee.

Mr. SMITH of Nebraska. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my strong support for this farm bill conference report. Given the ongoing challenges in the agriculture economy, it is very important our producers have policy certainty as they make their spring planting decisions.

I held a series of listening sessions around Nebraska's Third District, our Nation's number one producing district for agriculture, last year to hear producers' thoughts about the farm bill. The number one item on producers' minds was the continuation of strong crop insurance. This bill accomplishes this objective.

The bill also recognizes the challenges and threats facing our livestock producers by creating a disease prevention program and vaccine bank to help contain the potential future outbreak of disease within the livestock industry across our country.

This bill, and continued positive progress on trade, will go a long way toward increasing producers' peace of mind. I encourage my colleagues to join me in supporting this important piece of legislation, and I appreciate the support of the administration in bringing this legislation to a successful conclusion.

Mr. PETERSON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER).

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the gentleman's courtesy in permitting me to speak on the bill. I commend Mr. PETERSON, in particular, for guiding this important piece of legislation that actually includes many provisions that I have been working with for over 12 years.

He has been successful in protecting key Democratic priorities, especially nutrition, and avoiding damaging, poison-pill provisions. Near and dear to my heart are the reforms for hemp.

But, I am concerned that it does not adequately address the growing crisis in American agriculture. I spent 3 years going around Oregon talking to people, putting together our little "Fight for Food" booklet and legislation.

We are not dealing with the chemical welfare inspired by Monsanto/Bayer. We have the Trump tariffs and climate devastation that is getting more serious by the month. We have a crop insurance program that is not just wasteful, but fails most farmers and ranch-

ers that I represent and, indeed, in most States.

While I appreciate the legislative accomplishment that are represented here, I look forward to starting the next Congress with then-Chairman PETERSON to see if we can build on this foundation to narrow differences, broaden areas of agreement, do better for our farmers and ranchers, better for the environment, better for taxpayers and everyone who eats.

Mr. CONAWAY. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1½ minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. LAMALFA).

Mr. LAMALFA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the conference report to H.R. 2, but also strong commendation toward our chairman, Mr. CONAWAY, for having the many, many hearings about all aspects of the farm bill and the condition of the ag economy in this country.

□ 1515

This does represent a strong compromise response to the needs of rural America, where stability is needed; certainty to the farmers and ranchers weathering a 50 percent drop in farm income in recent years. A positive step for rural America and its ag economy where stability, again, is greatly needed.

Much of these resources are to remote, rural towns to improve broadband connectivity, which is critical for telehealth and further rural development.

It acknowledges the challenges faced by many California farmers, including prioritizing mechanization research to help address the continued ag labor shortage.

It maintains an accessible food supply for families in need, especially in rural, poor districts like mine, while also bringing an increment of accountability to the food stamp SNAP program.

It strengthens our rural development title to boost jobs in rural America, such as water conservation improvements and incentives as well.

I wish we could have done more on forestry. The town of Paradise and the surrounding area that suffered so much is a prime example of why we need to have better forest management in that State, in this whole country, but I think that continuing to have these conversations is extremely important.

So with the worst fires in State history, I am really, really hoping for that improvement.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BOST). The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. CONAWAY. Mr. Speaker, I yield an additional 30 seconds to the gentleman.

Mr. LAMALFA. Mr. Speaker, I commend Chairman CONAWAY for fighting for policies that support American agriculture.

We are in tough times right now, with 5 years of lower incomes. And the consistency and stability that farmers

need, all Americans need in the rural economy, this farm bill will make a significant impact in helping on that.

Mr. PETERSON. Mr. Speaker, may I inquire how much time I have remaining?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Minnesota has 19½ minutes remaining. The gentleman from Texas has 16½ minutes remaining.

Mr. PETERSON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1½ minutes to the gentlewoman from Delaware (Ms. BLUNT ROCHESTER), a member of the committee.

Ms. BLUNT ROCHESTER. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, friend, and ranking member, COLLIN PETERSON, for his wisdom and steadfast leadership through the farm bill reauthorization process, Chairman CONAWAY, and to all of the staff, who worked tirelessly.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the 2018 farm bill and to commend my colleagues on the farm bill conference committee for a truly bipartisan and bicameral product. I stand confident that the bill will move Delaware and our Nation forward.

It gives Delaware poultry growers the vital conservation resources they need when they need them. It shores up an already strong crop insurance program that protects our farmers against catastrophic loss. It provides additional sustainable resources for 1890 land-grant institutions, ensuring schools like Delaware State University continue their crucially important research while preparing the next generation in the ag economy.

And it also ensures nutrition benefits are maintained and protected for our children, seniors, individuals with disabilities, and families who rely on the social safety net to navigate difficult times.

All of these accomplishments were made possible by cooperation and compromise, which drew me to the Agriculture Committee in the first place.

We came together, we got something done, and that is what the American people want to see. This is a farm bill we can all be proud of, and I ask my colleagues to support it.

Mr. CONAWAY. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. ALLEN).

Mr. ALLEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the conference report to H.R. 2, the Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018.

Facing a nearly 50 percent decline in net farm income over the past 5 years, our Nation's farmers and ranchers have had their backs against the wall for far too long.

Today, we have an opportunity to right that ship, to secure a brighter future for our producers, rural communities, and American consumers.

As a member of the farm bill conference committee, I am confident that the agreement we have reached will strengthen the farm safety net and provide a sense of certainty and flexibility for those who feed and clothe our Nation.

Mr. Speaker, we have been working on this legislation since I came to Congress, and I would like to thank Chairman CONAWAY and the entire House Agriculture Committee for their work.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all my colleagues to join me in supporting H.R. 2, to reinvigorate rural America.

Mr. PETERSON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Ms. ADAMS), a member of the committee.

Ms. ADAMS. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Ranking Member PETERSON for yielding, also Chairman CONAWAY for all of his support.

I am proud today to speak on behalf of the 2018 farm bill. This bill is a strong, bipartisan piece of legislation. It works for families, for farmers, and for all communities.

The farm bill now avoids disastrous cuts to SNAP, a program which helps put food on the table for 44,000 people in Mecklenburg County alone, many of whom are children.

Additionally, the bill now avoids the mean-hearted, unreasonable work requirements that had been in the previous version of the House farm bill.

As founder and cochair of the bipartisan HBCU Caucus, I am particularly proud to have helped secure key resources for 1890 land-grant universities in this bill. The farm bill authorizes \$50 million to create three centers of excellence at 1890s and it ensures equity between land grants by removing provisions that strip away unspent extension funds for 1890 schools, and mandating a report that outlines research and extension funds for all land-grant institutions. This is a major legislative win for our land-grant HBCUs.

These are the reasons why I founded the HBCU Caucus, to bring together a coalition of Republicans and Democrats to fight together for greater funding and equity for all of our schools.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all of my colleagues on the conference committee, and I urge my colleagues to support this bipartisan bill later today.

Mr. CONAWAY. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentlewoman from Puerto Rico (Miss GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN).

Miss GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN of Puerto Rico. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the chairman for allowing me, even when I am opposed to one of the provisions, to speak about it.

As you may know, this bill has a lot of good things and good provisions for all the States and for the territories as well, but there is one provision that we are not allowed to even discuss in a public hearing, and that is the prohibition, or ban, to cockfights in the territories.

The current farm bill allowed territories to have and regulate that industry. In the case of Puerto Rico, that represents more than \$18 million in revenues and taxes. We are on the brink of a lot of financial situations, and now this regulation will put another burden on the people of the island.

So I am against that prohibition, mostly because the people of Puerto Rico have regulated the industry of cockfighting since 1933. So this is something that is not only affecting Puerto Rico, but the rest of the territories, as we have been facing this kind of industry and sport.

We don't have the votes in the Senate. We can't vote on the floor of the House. So our people are not fiscally represented, and as well Congress is taking an action that would put another burden on our economy.

Mr. Speaker, I reiterate my opposition, and the people of Puerto Rico, against that provision, but in favor of the rest of the bill.

Mr. PETERSON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. PANETTA), a member of the committee.

Mr. PANETTA. Mr. Speaker, I thank Chairman CONAWAY and Ranking Member PETERSON for their leadership during my time on the Agriculture Committee, during our time putting this farm bill together.

As a proud member of the Agriculture Committee, as a proud member who represents the salad bowl of the world, I am very proud to support H.R. 2, this farm bill, in 2018.

In my district on the central coast of California, this farm bill will benefit our specialty crop industry by investing in mechanization technology and expanding research opportunities.

It will help our organics industry with the certification process and research by incorporating the OREI Act.

This bill invests in our future farmers, our young ranchers, and veterans getting into agriculture.

It doesn't make any changes to SNAP without any evidence supporting such changes for the people who need food the most.

Mr. Speaker, I am at the end of my first term in Congress, and I can tell you this is the best job I have ever had, mainly because of the Members of Congress I work with, mainly because of the Democrats and Republicans I have worked with on this Agriculture Committee, including its excellent staff.

So despite the fact that there were differences over this farm bill at the beginning, and even though we are on the verge of a possible shutdown, what gives me confidence in this job, what gives me confidence in this body is this final version of this farm bill.

This is a bill that, although it started as a partisan product, it ended as a bipartisan bill. It is a bill that is not based on ideology and emotion; it is based on evidence. This is a bill that is not based on party politics; it is based on people, not just people in agriculture, but all of the people of this Nation.

That is why we all should be proud to support the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 and vote "yes" on the final conference report.

Mr. CONAWAY. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from New York (Mr. FASO).

Mr. FASO. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman for his leadership and I thank the ranking member for his leadership on this legislation.

The conference report provides much needed resources that will help farmers cope with a 5-year, 50 percent collapse in the farm economy, the largest such drop since the Great Depression.

During this process, we have acted in a bipartisan fashion to fix broken government programs that have not worked as intended and left farmers with nowhere to turn.

In upstate New York, perhaps none are hurting more than our local dairy farmers. New York is the third largest dairy State, and our farmers are hurting. The current dairy programs do not work, and improvements to the farm bill combined with those in the bipartisan Budget Act from earlier this year will help our farmers weather the storm.

We have made the dairy safety net more flexible by increasing coverage options, more affordable by reducing premiums, and more enticing for participation by bringing more incentives for those farmers to participate.

We have also worked to protect the SNAP program and laid the groundwork for future Congresses to make additional changes. By incentivizing work through better local workforce consultation and reducing the number of waivers that States can bring, we can bring more recipients into the workforce during a time of record low unemployment.

Additionally, changes like the National Accuracy Clearing House and minimum standards for participant tracking will help enhance program integrity and ensure that benefits are available to those that need them most.

Mr. Chairman, I urge adoption of the farm bill. Upstate New York and our farmers have waited long enough. I am proud to support this legislation.

Mr. PETERSON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. EVANS), a member of the committee.

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank both chairmen for their leadership in this opportunity of bringing us all together.

I chose to be a member of the Agriculture Committee because this committee has jurisdiction over some of the most critical issues facing our community, that is food and nutrition.

Even back in Pennsylvania, one issue that has been central to my work is ensuring that people in every neighborhood in Philadelphia, between west Philadelphia and north Philadelphia, south Philadelphia, had access to safe, healthy, and reasonably priced food.

In Philadelphia, 20 percent of our population is food insecure, meaning one in five Philadelphians don't know where their next meal will come from.

I am pleased to see that this bill maintains SNAP and does not weigh down poor and hungry Pennsylvanians with onerous work rules.

But let's be clear: this is just a beginning. No child should go to bed hungry. No parent should have to make the choice between putting food on the table or keeping the lights on.

In times of peace and in times of war, our soldiers must always have a food source in order to provide the necessary safety and security our democracies depend on for survival.

As a member of the Agriculture Committee, I had the opportunity to meet with members of the ag community at all levels, from farmers to consumers. I have come to better understand the needs of Pennsylvania's hardworking farmers and others in the broad agriculture community through events such as the Pennsylvania Farm Show and the Ag Progress Days.

And over time, through meetings with advocates, the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, The Food Trust, the National Young Farmers Coalition, Philabundance, Central Pennsylvania Food Bank, and National Farmers Union, I am happy to say that this bill does a lot of work for them.

In addition to SNAP, this bill addresses hunger by increasing funding for everyone.

This bill also provides greater flexibility in coverage and tools for Pennsylvania dairy farmers, investing in rural infrastructure, supports research of 1890 land-grant universities, and maintains fundamental conservation programs.

Food unites us. Food is medicine. Food is foreign policy. And I say this: this bill is a starting point. We have to work together, and I look forward to working on this bill to make it stronger.

Mr. Speaker, I thank both chairmen and I thank the staff for all their collective work together.

Yes, we should vote a resounding "yes."

Mr. CONAWAY. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

□ 1530

Mr. PETERSON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON LEE).

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, last year, in Hurricane Harvey, many in my community became food insecure. I cannot tell you how important maintaining the current SNAP benefits are.

I thank the chairman from Texas and my good friend, to-be chairman from Minnesota, for their coming together.

The importance of funding going to my land grant colleges is enormous in training new farmers.

The work that is being added—as a member of the Homeland Security Committee—on adding broadband in the rural communities is something that is so dearly needed and has been promised for many, many years.

The fact that we are expanding access to FSA farm loans for veterans, but, more importantly, for beginning farmers, creates a new pathway for

those who are providing for us as the breadbasket of the world.

And then, in the rural areas of my district, rural economic development is crucial, and the rural development funds are vital. So many things have been able to occur because of this funding.

I ask my colleagues to support this bill because this is a perfect coming together. As former Congresswoman Shirley Chisolm said: A tree grows in Brooklyn. It is a good coming together of urban and rural supporting a dynamic bill and providing so that Americans are not food insecure and our children have the nutrition that they need.

Let us vote for this bill.

Mr. CONAWAY. Mr. Speaker, may I inquire as to how much time is left on both sides.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Texas has 13½ minutes remaining. The gentleman from Minnesota has 11 minutes remaining.

Mr. CONAWAY. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. PETERSON. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 1½ minutes to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. SOTO), a member of the committee.

Mr. SOTO. Mr. Speaker, it has been a long road, but it looks like we are bringing it in for a landing, and America is thankful for a farm bill that we can all be proud of. That includes central Florida.

We saw huge issues included to help out our orange growers in central Florida facing citrus greening, which is really hurting our local growers and hurting that iconic orange juice coming from Florida.

We saw the inclusion of the National Animal Health Vaccine Bank, which helps out ranchers both in central Florida and throughout the United States.

We saw a SNAP program that will continue to help out needy families.

We saw prioritizing conservation, which is a win for both farmers and conservationists alike in an ever more crowded Florida.

We also saw four bills that we crafted and put forward included, and I thank the gentleman from Texas and the gentleman from Minnesota for their help with that.

The veterans with disabilities language that provides technical training, that was something that I got an idea of when I was out in Midland speaking to one of the gentleman from Texas' constituents.

The bill that allowed for authorization of agricultural research between the United States and Israel is a program that needed a long time to be authorized, and we are excited to have it.

Algae-based research to look at biofuels is helpful.

And just to conclude, we are also developing high-tech sensors in central Florida for agriculture.

I thank all of the people on the committee for their good work.

Mr. CONAWAY. Mr. Speaker, I continue to reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. PETERSON. Mr. Speaker, I am now pleased to yield 1 minute to the gentleman from Florida (Mr. LAWSON), a member of the committee.

Mr. LAWSON of Florida. Mr. Speaker, for the past 2 years, serving on the Agriculture Committee, we worked on the farm bill. But also, in my district, which is so important and critical, we have had two hurricanes. The resources that we have had from previous farm bills were very significant. We just got over Hurricane Michael, which has caused a lot of damage throughout my district.

But the most important issue, even the other things that we are doing for farmers in this, is about food insecurity. When I talk about food insecurity, I talk about going into my area where 100 percent of students are on free and reduced lunch, and the farm bill takes care of that.

I congratulate my leader and my chairman over here for their work and the hard work they put in to make this a reality.

Also in this farm bill is money for HBCUs, historically African American universities, to do more research and to get more involved so that we can feed America.

I am so proud and ask all of my colleagues to vote positively for this farm bill, because one great President said: "The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here."

I can tell you that when we vote for this bill, people in need—farmers, all those people in this bill, the Forest Service and everything—will never forget what we did here, and I encourage you.

Mr. CONAWAY. Mr. Speaker, I continue to reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. PETERSON. Mr. Speaker, in closing, I thank everybody who was involved in this, the committee members and their staff. It was a bumpy road, but we figured out how to get through it and came to a bipartisan conclusion. That is the important thing.

This is a good bill for my district. I think it is a good bill for agriculture, in general, around the country, and it is a good bill for America.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all of my colleagues to support H.R. 2, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. CONAWAY. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, before I finish, I would like to also add my thanks to the majority staff and the minority staff in the House, as well as the minority and the majority staff in the Senate. Untold hours were spent getting us to this place by these hardworking men and women who labor in relative anonymity. COLLIN and I get all the gratitude, pats on the back, hugs, and smooches, and they do all of the hard work.

I would like to recognize Matt Schertz, my staff director; Bart Fisch-

er, deputy staff director and chief economist; Patricia Straughn; Nicole Scott; Rachel Millard; Josh Maxwell; Jennifer Tiller; Paul Balzano; Trevor White; Callie McAdams; Caleb Crosswhite; Carly Reedholm; Mollie Wilken; Mindi Brookhart; John Weber; Jeremy Witte; Ashton Johnston; Yasmin Rey; Darryl Blakey; Abigail Camp; Ricki Schroeder; Margaret Wetherald; John Konya; Maggie Mullins; Faisal Siddiqui; Brian Martin-Haynes; Kevin Norton; Brandon Reeves; and Nicole Bayne for all of their hard work and all of the time spent away from their families over the last year-plus getting to this point.

Mr. Speaker, in a few minutes, there are going to be red and green lights go up behind your head. Pressure that is facing America's farmers and ranchers and their families is just unimaginable to those of us who aren't directly in the business: pressures of 5 years of reduced income; 5 years of burning through savings and capital; 5 years of really difficult circumstances; commodity prices low with no real relief on the horizon; trade turmoil across the world; lots of things going bad; as I mentioned earlier in my conversation, a 30 percent increase in bankruptcies. But, Mr. Speaker, the one thought that troubles me the most is the increase in suicides. The pressures of losing a multigenerational farm and ranch operation must be incredible to cause men and women to decide to make an awful decision as a result of those pressures.

This bill will help alleviate that. This bill takes a look at those pressures, takes a look at the stresses and strains across all of rural America—economic development issues, the issues within just the practice of farming and ranching—and says here are Federal resources that we want to put against those problems, against the issues of farmers going out of business, and continuing to provide to the American consumer the most abundant, safest, and affordable food supply of any developed nation in the world.

Across these last 2 years, with President Trump in office, you have seen an awful lot of comments about "buy America" and "let's produce things in America." There is nothing more American than food produced in our Nation, and this bill will keep us in that vein. It will keep those farmers and ranchers taking those risks, risks that none of us could imagine, year in and year out: worrying about Mother Nature, too much rain, too little rain, rain at the wrong time, too hot, not hot enough, all of those things that they have no control over. They will fight that fight day in and day out, and they are the best in the world at doing it.

What they can't do, though, is fight against the cheating in the trade world that is out there, fight against commodity prices that they can't control. They can't control their input costs. They are takers of those costs, and they are takers of prices. They are at

the mercy of an awful lot of pressures and stresses and strains that this bill tends to address.

So, Mr. Speaker, the green lights, in my view, when they start lighting up, will be the Members who have taken a look at all these things, all these issues that are facing rural America and our farmers and ranchers, and will say, yes, this bill does, in fact, address those; it does get at those issues; it does offer 5 years of stability for these folks, 5 years of lenders being able to know what the safety net will look like and being able to lend against next year's crop, 5 years of certainty.

We all work better under certainty, and knowing what this farm bill looks like, wrong or different, is far better than the option of us rolling this over to next year and starting this process over. Those green lights will be Members who have looked at all of that and said, yes, this bill is worthy of my support, worthy of my vote.

Mr. Speaker, the red lights will say something entirely different. It will say that we looked at those exact same issues, we looked at these solutions, these Federal resources, and said either they are too much, not enough, they want it to go somewhere else, or, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, there will be some who will say, well, there just weren't things in there that we would like to have happen.

Mr. Speaker, the House version that we passed back in June took some mighty bold steps toward reforming SNAP and moving in a direction that most of us believe was supported by the American people. Asking SNAP recipients to work 20 hours a week in order to maintain that public benefit, that public effort, we believe was the right way to go. That was not supported broadly by the body across the building, and we made the compromises necessary to get us to this place.

In spite of that, though, Mr. Speaker, we made good reforms toward the SNAP process, toward program integrity, and making the program work better for folks who need these programs.

The House version never intended to touch, nor did it touch, the folks we will always take care of: the elderly, the mentally and physically disabled, those who are temporarily out of whack. It never touched that.

What it did, Mr. Speaker, was go after those folks who are able-bodied, should be working and should be in the workforce. We have 7 million unfilled jobs today, and there is work ahead of us to make this happen.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, I thank my colleagues on the other side of the aisle. I thank COLLIN PETERSON for his hard work on the conference committee. I thank our Senate colleagues who took a different view, but we are here today. Mr. Speaker, I pray that when the lights go up behind your head that there are more green lights than red lights, we can get this to the President's desk, and get that certainty for rural America that is necessary.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. FUDGE. Mr. Speaker, the conference report for the 2018 Farm Bill continues our safety net for farmers and maintains a safety net for struggling Americans. I would like to share with my colleagues a little bit more about how the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, also known as the 2018 Farm Bill, makes key improvements to protect the integrity of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP, while still preserving critical food access for millions of families.

The bill does not accomplish everything on this front that I and many of my democratic colleagues might have wanted. Many of us would have been looking for ways to make needed investments in this vital food benefit for tens of millions of Americans. But, the provisions related to SNAP, the nation's most effective nutrition program, make modest and useful improvements in this essential weapon in the fight against hunger in our nation. Just as important, the bill protects SNAP by rejecting proposals in the House Farm Bill that would have severely weakened the program and taken food assistance away from nearly 2 million people.

First, I would like to talk about the SNAP improvements in the bill, one of which will help people who are experiencing homelessness to get better food assistance. SNAP's benefit formula assumes that families will spend 30 percent of their net income for food. In determining their net income, households can deduct certain expenses that limit the funds they have available to pay for food, including housing.

Like other individuals and families, those who are homeless often face housing costs, like paying for a motel room or reimbursing friends or family for a temporary home. Congress created the homeless shelter deduction to give them access to additional SNAP benefits by allowing them to deduct their shelter costs. The 2002 Farm Bill improved the deduction by allowing states to set it at a flat \$143 rather than requiring them to collect and submit the paperwork needed to verify their shelter costs. My own state of Ohio adopted this option years ago. I cannot understand why all states haven't taken this easy step to assist homeless households obtain food assistance that reflects their actual out of pocket costs. I am pleased the conference report requires all states to adopt the deduction and raise the \$143 figure each year to reflect inflation, so the deduction keeps its value over time.

In setting the homeless shelter deduction as a standard part of the program, the Farm Bill also maintains its key features. States will have flexibility to decide what kinds of documentation they will accept from clients claiming shelter costs, including the client's statement of what they have been spending. And, states must continue to help homeless households claim the regular shelter deduction rather than the homeless deduction if that would get them more SNAP benefits.

Another SNAP improvement in the conference report will set the stage for future, much-needed improvements in the basic SNAP benefit. The bill includes a House Farm Bill provision requiring USDA to revise its Thrifty Food Plan—which reflects the cost of a basic, nutritionally adequate diet—on a regular basis to reflect the latest information on food

costs, actual consumption, and dietary guidelines. This is an important step because SNAP benefit amounts are based on the Thrifty Food Plan.

When USDA updates the Thrifty Food Plan to reflect current consumer choices and newer healthy food guidelines, the Administration has always required that USDA's new Thrifty Food Plan food basket cost the same as the old basket. That means that USDA has had to make unrealistic assumptions about what a typical household can actually do to buy and prepare food. Academics, including the National Academy of Sciences, have noted how distorted the current package is relative to what is realistic about what households typically buy, how much time it takes them and how much food that meets the dietary guidelines actually costs—even when it is a very bare bones diet. I want to make clear that our provision does not have that cost limitation and we fully expect the Administration to report out to us what the cost of a modern Thrifty Food Plan would costs. I expect that means that the cost will increase and as a result that SNAP's maximum allotment will also increase, an adjustment that is long overdue.

The conference report also has provisions to help more food retailers support SNAP. Nearly 9,700 Ohio food stores participate in SNAP. In my own district, the 11th District, it is just over 800 stores, ranging from large superstores to local farmers' markets. The new bill will enable retailers to offer incentives for SNAP participants. Stores will still have to treat SNAP participants like other customers, but with one exception. Stores will now have the option of offering them modest incentives, such as targeted coupons.

As I mentioned earlier, the conference report is as important for what it does not do regarding SNAP as for what it does do. The Conference Committee rejected all the harsh benefit and eligibility changes in the House bill, which means SNAP will still be available to the tens of millions of Americans who use it to help them afford a decent diet.

Most notably, the conference report rejects the House approach of taking away SNAP benefits from those who struggle to work. Instead, it seeks to improve clients' job outcomes by focusing on job training. It encourages states to work more directly with local employers, expands the options that states have over the types of programs they can offer through their SNAP employment and training programs, and reallocates funds to states with existing pilot programs and states with programs that target specific populations with barriers to work, such as the formerly incarcerated. While job search will no longer be allowed as an allowable stand-alone activity, states will be able to continue supervised job search programs as they see fit, including online job search that meets state supervision requirements and definitions.

The Conference Committee also rejected House provisions that would shorten SNAP's three-month time limit to one month and expand the population subject to the rule to a broader group of recipients. We also rejected the House's proposal to limit states' flexibility to waive high-unemployment areas from the three-month limit. Contrary to statements by some House members, governors are aware of the waivers their state SNAP agencies seek, but the conference report clarifies current practice by stating that states seek should

waivers with the authority provided to them by their chief executive. We specifically directed USDA that this clarification should have no impact on the current waiver process and that the agency may not add additional steps or clearances to the application process.

We also rejected the House's proposal to undo a long-standing state option called categorical eligibility. Under this option, states can import the gross income or asset tests from a TANF-funded program into SNAP. States can simplify and streamline SNAP eligibility and enrollment processes but easing these rules and they can expand who is eligible for the program including more working poor, recently unemployed with modest savings and more senior households with savings above the federal limits. This House proposal would have eliminated benefits for some 2 million people in nearly 1 million households. I appreciate Senator Stabenow's leadership in fighting back against this proposal.

Another House proposal the conference report wisely rejected would force all states to require SNAP participants to cooperate with child support enforcement—something that's now a state option as a condition of SNAP eligibility. Given the deep concerns about the current option we heard from community groups representing grandparents and victims of domestic violence in states that have adopted it, we could not mandate the option. In fact, we included a study on this option to better understand its impact. USDA can help us gather more information about the damage this option is causing particularly by gathering the perspective of those individuals who avoid SNAP out of fear of having to cooperate with child support enforcement.

In contrast to the issues I have discussed above, strengthening SNAP's payment accuracy and reducing fraud is not a partisan question, and the conference report reflects that fact. For example, it requires all states to implement a pilot program called the National Accuracy Clearinghouse, which uses data matching to ensure an individual or household doesn't receive SNAP from two different states simultaneously. This is relatively rare and can occur due to state error or deliberate fraud. It usually is not due to fraud—instead, it generally happens when SNAP participants move to a new state and apply for benefits there, after notifying their former state that they were leaving, but the former state does not expeditiously take them off the program. Nevertheless, it is a problem that needs addressing, and this new interstate data matching will help states do that by making their processes for disenrolling families more efficient and accurate. This will only be an improvement to the program if USDA ensures that this process happens seamlessly for applicants, including resolving any issues with a state that shows the clients remain enrolled. SNAP participants are by their very nature struggling to afford food and life's necessities. They cannot afford time of work, long distance phone calls or attorneys to settle bureaucratic nuances. The sensible approach would be simply to disenroll the client from the state claiming dual enrollment and let it end there. Without evidence the client was trying to commit a crime by enrolling twice, USDA and states should assume innocent error and leave it at that.

One change that might surprise my colleagues is that we discovered that by dropping a Senate pilot program on income verification

we might actually advance state efforts to streamline verification. The Senate bill included a provision to test using third party data sources, mostly run by private companies to verify income. Large employers like big box stores or fast food chains employ many workers who are also eligible for benefits. They often use a third-party vendor to verify income for programs like SNAP and Medicaid. You would think we would have been anxious to sort how best to move forward with helping states to use this type of verification. The Conference Committee came to understand that many states are already using these private vendors to verify income. As it happens, states are paying for these services for SNAP with a federal match, and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is also paying the same vendor for the same data to assist states with verifying income for health benefit determinations. States have access to the HHS data for Medicaid but cannot use it for SNAP under the limits of the contract. Fortunately, HHS can elect an option under the contract to share the same income verification data they provide to Medicaid with SNAP. This would be an extraordinary advancement in simplification and accuracy and it ought to provide the federal government monetary savings. This type of economy of scale in procurement would be a real windfall in contract payment and improve benefit accuracy.

Also, to explore new ways SNAP can help low-income populations, the conference report authorizes USDA to work with states to set up longitudinal data sets using SNAP administrative data and other sources that would allow states, USDA, and researchers to study caseload dynamics and other issues over time. While our preference would be to capture states' entire caseload for the dataset, perfection should not be the enemy of the good. The goal is to pursue research, not to build a perfect dataset. States can decide what will work best for them with respect to how to construct the dataset—whether they want to use a sample of their caseload or some other approach. By contrast, there must be consistent federal rules ensuring the highest degree of data privacy and security for clients. This data is meant to be available to researchers and the public to use, so all personal identifying information must be removed from the records.

That brings me to the issue of quality control. The conference report includes several changes designed to create more consistency among states in how they measure payment accuracy. In the past, FNS has not evenly applied the rules in this area across states; the conference report changes largely codify steps USDA is taking to help address this problem. Going forward, FNS and the states must work together to improve consistency in measuring payment accuracy. For its part, FNS must strengthen federal review of state quality control procedures.

On a related issue, the final conference report eliminates bonuses to states for high and improved performance in key aspects of program operations. States are always expected to deliver high quality services through SNAP to participants. This is required by law and is expected by Congress and taxpayers. Quality, timely and accurate delivery of benefits to eligible households is the basic standard. Eliminating bonuses does not change that. Nor should it change USDA's scrutiny of state performance on these fronts. Payment accuracy,

including improper denials, program access and timeliness are all standards against which states must be measured, and when states do not perform to expected standards, USDA must and will continue to take corrective actions.

In sum, while this legislation is necessarily a compromise, overall it will make SNAP stronger and better able to help millions of Americans put food on the table—including families with children, persons with disabilities, and seniors. SNAP is more important to our nation's seniors than many realize.

The typical SNAP household with an elderly member includes a single elderly person with income of about \$11,000 a year, or a little below the poverty line. In fact, nearly 3 in 4 SNAP households with an elderly member live in poverty. SNAP households with an elderly member receive an average of about \$1,500 a year in benefits.

The House Farm Bill would have cut SNAP eligibility for seniors, made it harder for grandparents informally caring for their grandchildren to participate in SNAP, and subjected older workers to work requirements despite the difficulty they face in the labor market. One of the main strengths of the conference report is that it does not include these and other negative House proposals. That rejection, along with the conference report's modest positive changes, will help SNAP continue to fulfill its role of supporting needy families in our nation.

Mr. NEAL. Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the efforts of my colleagues on the Agriculture Committee, which have resulted in this bipartisan bill. I am particularly pleased that the conference report rejects controversial provisions from the House bill, which would have increased hunger and hardship for millions of Americans, who are struggling to work. The House-passed cuts would have harmed many children, seniors, and working parents in my home state of Massachusetts, where about one in nine residents currently relies on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance program (SNAP) to put food on the table.

I would like to comment in more detail about one specific cut that the Conference Committee rejected. It was titled "Update to Categorical Eligibility", but the proposal was largely a repeal of a decades-old state option in SNAP that allows states to liberalize the SNAP gross income and asset test by providing them or providing access to a TANF-funded benefit. Repealing this option would have terminated food assistance to close to 2 million low-income people across the country, including families in Massachusetts. The Conference Committee was wise to reject the cut.

As a member of the Ways and Means Committee since 1993 and as a member who was actively engaged in our debates and supported final passage of the 1996 law, I'd like to remind my colleagues of this option in SNAP to use TANF income and asset tests to simplify administration and access to benefits families need.

Under categorical eligibility, states can raise SNAP income eligibility cutoffs and asset limits and align SNAP's rules with those that states set for benefits funded through TANF. With this option, 32 states have lifted SNAP's income limits, extending the program to more working families. Over 40 states have used the option to adopt less restrictive asset tests, that is, the amount of financial assets, such as

in a savings account, that a household may own and remain eligible for SNAP. Making the safety net more flexible and allowing states to be more responsive to the needs of working families was a key design feature of the welfare law. This option to expand what was then called food stamps and the option to expand Medicaid were key elements of that purpose. President Clinton set up the guidelines that govern the option which are very much in keeping with how TANF benefits work.

Unfortunately, it would appear that the Trump Administration may attempt to make the policy change Congress specifically rejected, without our authorization. The Administration has signaled that it plans to re-regulate the rules governing categorical eligibility. Let me be clear, the Administration has no authority to roll back or curb the option. The law is straightforward. Households that receive a TANF-funded benefit are categorically eligible for SNAP. And, TANF law is clear that funds under the block grant can go for purposes and populations that cover all SNAP eligible households. This decades-old policy option is not up for debate or reinterpretation. In converting the Aid for Dependent Families entitlement program into a block grant, Congress understood the tremendous flexibility it was giving states to use funds for a wide range of purposes, including both assistance and benefit programs. How states use the funds can be inspirational or frustrating. Many of us wish they would focus more on serving poor children. Nevertheless, the legal flexibility conferred to states under the TANF block grant funding stream to create benefit programs and services with many different purposes and with less restrictive eligibility rules than SNAP also means that states can use these programs to confer categorical eligibility, and provide SNAP for all those determined eligible for such programs. This includes programs and services created solely to leverage this option.

The Trump Administration would be wise not to attempt an unlawful rollback of this option. It would run counter to the law and harm families in need.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, American agriculture is a dynamic part of our national economy and a significant part of our local communities. Agriculture impacts the life of every American, and it is important that this industry can continue to meet the needs of our nation.

This Farm Bill Conference Report strikes a strong balance of reforms while providing the stability that our nation's farmers and rural communities need. Over the past five years rural America has endured some of the toughest economic times seen in generations. These hardworking men and women get up every day to put food not only on their table, but yours and mine as well.

This Farm Bill provides the stability they need to run a successful business and take care of their families. It strengthens rural development initiatives and makes significant investments in rural broadband.

Additionally, while promoting sound agriculture policy this legislation legalizes the production of hemp as an agricultural commodity and removes it from the list of controlled substances. In 2017, the sale of hemp products totaled an estimated 800 million dollars in the United States, however the majority of those products were imported from China and Canada. American farmers will now be able to

take advantage of this untapped market and begin growing hemp to capitalize on its many commercial uses.

In closing, I would like to commend Chairman Conaway and his staff for their unrelenting work on this Farm Bill. It has been a privilege to fight alongside you on the House Agriculture Committee to ensure prosperity for rural America. I am proud to support this important legislation and it has been a true privilege to represent the interests of farmers from Virginia's Sixth District. I urge a yes vote.

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for his tremendous leadership on this bill and so many other issues. It is because of democratic leadership that this bill rejected all of the harmful changes to nutrition, so I thank him for that.

I rise today in support of the Farm Bill conference report (H.R. 2). This bill reauthorizes SNAP—our nation's first line of defense against hunger. This bill also rejects the dangerous and immoral work requirements, which would have pushed 2 million people further into hunger and poverty.

Mr. Speaker, nutrition assistance helps 40 million people put food on the table. And the vast majority of families who receive food stamps are working.

In fact, more than 80 percent of SNAP households work the year before or after receiving aid. This program helps the working poor, children, the disabled and seniors. It's a necessary lifeline to our fellow Americans who otherwise would go hungry.

And I know how important this program is, Mr. Speaker, when I was a young, single mom raising two little boys, I relied on food stamps to help my family during a very difficult time in my life. It was a bridge over troubled waters. And quite frankly I would not be where I am today without that assistance.

All families should have this bridge over troubled waters when they need it.

And Mr. Speaker, while this bill is a step in the right direction for our anti-poverty work, we must do more to ensure that all families have nutritious and regular meals every day. No one in the richest nation on earth should go hungry but unfortunately 40 million do. 40 million.

So, I urge my colleagues support this bill and to redouble our efforts to end poverty and hunger in our nation.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. All time for debate has expired.

Pursuant to House Resolution 1176, the previous question is ordered on the conference report.

The question is on the conference report.

The question was taken; and the Speaker pro tempore announced that the ayes appeared to have it.

Mr. CONAWAY. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

□ 1545

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, proceedings

will resume on questions previously postponed.

Votes will be taken in the following order:

Adoption of the conference report on H.R. 2; and

The motion to suspend the rules and concur in the Senate amendment to H.R. 2454, if ordered.

The first electronic vote will be conducted as a 15-minute vote. The second electronic vote will be conducted as a 5-minute vote.

CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 2 AGRICULTURE AND NUTRITION ACT OF 2018

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The unfinished business is the question on adoption of the conference report on the bill (H.R. 2) to provide for the reform and continuation of agricultural and other programs of the Department of Agriculture through fiscal year 2023, and for other purposes, on which the yeas and nays were ordered.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the conference report.

The vote was taken by electronic device, and there were—yeas 369, nays 47, not voting 16, as follows:

[Roll No. 434]

YEAS—369

Abraham	Clark (MA)	Esty (CT)
Adams	Clarke (NY)	Evans
Aderholt	Clay	Faso
Aguilar	Cleaver	Ferguson
Allen	Cloud	Fitzpatrick
Amodei	Clyburn	Fleischmann
Arrington	Cohen	Flores
Babin	Cole	Fortenberry
Bacon	Collins (GA)	Foster
Balderson	Collins (NY)	Frankel (FL)
Banks (IN)	Comer	Fudge
Barr	Comstock	Gabbard
Barragán	Conaway	Gallego
Bass	Connolly	Garamendi
Beatty	Cook	Gianforte
Bera	Cooper	Gibbs
Bergman	Correa	Gomez
Beyer	Costa	Gonzalez (TX)
Bilirakis	Costello (PA)	Goodlatte
Bishop (GA)	Courtney	Gottheimer
Bishop (MI)	Cramer	Gowdy
Bishop (UT)	Crawford	Granger
Black	Crist	Graves (GA)
Blackburn	Crowley	Graves (LA)
Blum	Cuellar	Graves (MO)
Blunt	Culberson	Green, Al
Bonamici	Cummings	Green, Gene
Bost	Curbelo (FL)	Griffith
Boyle, Brendan F.	Curtis	Grijalva
Brady (PA)	Davis (CA)	Grothman
Brady (TX)	Davis, Danny	Guthrie
Brooks (AL)	Davis, Rodney	Gutiérrez
Brooks (IN)	DeFazio	Hanabusa
Brown (MD)	DeGette	Handel
Brownley (CA)	Delaney	Harper
Bucshon	DeLauro	Hastings
Burgess	DelBene	Heck
Bustos	Demings	Hern
Butterfield	Denham	Herrera Beutler
Byrne	DeSaulnier	Higgins (LA)
Calvert	DesJarlais	Higgins (NY)
Capuano	Deutch	Hill
Carbajal	Diaz-Balart	Himes
Cárdenas	Dingell	Hollingsworth
Carson (IN)	Doyle, Michael F.	Hoyer
Carter (TX)	Duffy	Hudson
Cartwright	Dunn	Huffman
Castor (FL)	Emmer	Huizenga
Castro (TX)	Engel	Hultgren
Cheney	Eshoo	Hunter
Chu, Judy	Españolat	Hurd
Ciulline	Estes (KS)	Issa
		Jackson Lee

Jayapal	Moolenaar	Scott, David
Jeffries	Morelle	Serrano
Jenkins (KS)	Moulton	Sessions
Johnson (GA)	Mullin	Sewell (AL)
Johnson (LA)	Murphy (FL)	Shea-Porter
Johnson (OH)	Nadler	Sherman
Johnson, E. B.	Napolitano	Shimkus
Jones (MI)	Neal	Shuster
Joyce (OH)	Newhouse	Simpson
Kaptur	Noem	Sinema
Katko	Nolan	Sires
Kelly (IL)	Norcross	Smith (MO)
Kelly (MS)	Nunes	Smith (NE)
Kelly (PA)	O'Halleran	Smith (NJ)
Kennedy	O'Rourke	Smith (TX)
Khanna	Olson	Smith (WA)
Kihuen	Palazzo	Smucker
Kildee	Pallone	Soto
Kilmer	Palmer	Speier
King (IA)	Panetta	Stefanik
King (NY)	Pascrell	Stivers
Kinzinger	Paulsen	Suozi
Krishnamoorthi	Pearce	Swalwell (CA)
Kuster (NH)	Pelosi	Takano
Kustoff (TN)	Perlmutter	Taylor
LaHood	Peters	Tenney
LaMalfa	Peterson	Thompson (CA)
Lamb	Pingree	Thompson (MS)
Langevin	Pittenger	Thompson (PA)
Larsen (WA)	Pocan	Thornberry
Larson (CT)	Poe (TX)	Tipton
Latta	Poliquin	Titus
Lawrence	Price (NC)	Tonko
Lawson (FL)	Quigley	Torres
Lee	Raskin	Trott
Levin	Reed	Tsongas
Lewis (GA)	Reichert	Turner
Lieu, Ted	Renacci	Upton
Lipinski	Rice (NY)	Valadao
LoBiondo	Rice (SC)	Vargas
Loeback	Richmond	Veasey
Lofgren	Roby	Vela
Long	Roe (TN)	Velázquez
Love	Rogers (AL)	Visclosky
Lowenthal	Rogers (KY)	Wagner
Lowey	Rohrabacher	Walberg
Lucas	Rokita	Walden
Luetkemeyer	Rooney, Thomas J.	Walker
Lujan, Ben Ray	Ros-Lehtinen	Walorski
Lynch	Rosen	Walters, Mimi
MacArthur	Roskam	Wasserman
Maloney,	Ross	Schultz
Carolyn B.	Rouzer	Waters, Maxine
Maloney, Sean	Roybal-Allard	Watson Coleman
Marchant	Royce (CA)	Weber (TX)
Marino	Ruiz	Webster (FL)
Marshall	Ruppersberger	Welch
Matsui	Rush	Wenstrup
McCarthy	Russell	Westerman
McCaul	Rutherford	Wild
McCollum	Ryan (OH)	Williams
McEachin	Sánchez	Wilson (FL)
McGovern	Sarbanes	Wilson (SC)
McHenry	Scalise	Wittman
McKinley	Scanlon	Womack
McMorris	Schakowsky	Woodall
Rodgers	Schiff	Yarmuth
McNerney	Schneider	Yoder
Meeks	Schrader	Yoho
Meng	Scott (VA)	Young (AK)
Messer	Scott, Austin	Young (IA)
Mitchell		Zeldin

NAYS—47

Amash	Gallagher	Massie
Biggs	Garrett	Mast
Blumenauer	Gohmert	McClintock
Brat	Gosar	McSally
Buck	Harris	Meadows
Budd	Hensarling	Mooney (WV)
Carter (GA)	Hice, Jody B.	Norman
Chabot	Holding	Perry
Coffman	Johnson, Sam	Posey
Davidson	Jordan	Ratcliffe
Doggett	Kind	Rooney, Francis
Duncan (SC)	Lamborn	Rothfus
Duncan (TN)	Lance	Sanford
Fox	Lesko	Schweikert
Frelinghuysen	Lewis (MN)	Sensenbrenner
Gaetz	Loudermilk	

NOT VOTING—16

Barletta	Jones (NC)	Moore
Barton	Keating	Payne
Buchanan	Knight	Polis
Donovan	Labrador	Stewart
Ellison	Lujan Grisham, M.	Walz
Hartzler		