

How One Cartoon Summed Up the Cronyism Inherent in the Farm Bill

Outside of the Midwest, few Americans fully understand just how difficult life can be for farmers who operate small, family operations across the country.

To put it into perspective, here are just some (not all) of the expenses a small, 100-acre family farm may incur just to produce a crop:

- Seed corn, costs \$125 per bag, which plants 2.5 acres = total cost of \$5,000
- Fertilizer, varies by soil type and moisture levels, but \$175 per acre isn't unreasonable = total cost of \$17,500
- Medium-sized row planter (12 rows, 15 acres per hour) costs \$32,300, amortized over 10 years = total cost of \$3,850 (per year)
- Medium-sized tractor (100 hp, four-wheel drive, with an all-weather cab) costs \$67,500, amortized over 10 years = total cost of \$8,000 (per year)
- Medium-sized combine harvester costs \$425,000, amortized over 10 years = total cost of \$50,500 (per year)
- Medium-sized grain cart with auger costs \$3,000, amortized over 10 years = total cost of \$350 (per year)

These expenses alone total more than \$85,000. The crop, if it does well, should produce 200 bushels of corn per acre, or roughly 20,000 bushels of corn, which at current market prices comes to just under \$80,000 in gross income, and we haven't factored in crop insurance, or taxes that have to be paid on the property and equipment.

This demonstration explains why the Farm Bill, which Congress will soon begin formulating for its upcoming renewal in 2019,

is so important to small family farms. But, it also explains why those input costs continue to climb, and why so many small family farms are selling out to corporate farming interests.

Many conservatives in Congress are rightly concerned about farm subsidies, which are intended to help out small production farmers, but instead are being funneled as “corporate welfare” to large agribusiness companies. But, a recent cartoon that ran in a regional farm publication this week has exposed just how deep the cronyism has seeped.

In the cartoon, created by longtime farm cartoonist Rick Friday, two farmers are standing at a fence, discussing the current state of the agricultural economy. One says, “I wish there was more profit in farming.” The other responded, “There is. In year 2015 the CEOs of Monsanto, DuPont Pioneer and John Deere combined made more money than 2,129 Iowa farmers.”

A seed company that does business with one of those larger corporations objected to the cartoon and pulled its advertising. Friday was then quickly informed that his services to the farm publication would no longer be needed.

Over the course of 21 years, he had produced nearly 1,100 weekly cartoons for the publication. {eoa}