

Adams on Agriculture
Interview with Rodney Davis
March 29, 2018

Note: This is an unofficial transcript of a discussion with Mike Adams and Rep. Rodney Davis (R., Ill.) from the *Adams on Agriculture (AOA)* radio program.

Adams: All right, welcome back. So early in the week we heard from Ranking Member of the House Ag Committee Collin Peterson talking about the concerns the Democrats have with the nutrition portion of the farm bill proposal. Then yesterday we heard from Chairman Mike Conaway answering those criticisms, explaining the proposal. But still this impasse continues. I want to get some more perspective from another member of the committee, Illinois Congressman Rodney Davis. Congressman, thanks for joining us here on Adams on Agriculture.

Davis: Hey, Mike. Thanks for having me, buddy. I always enjoy being on with you.

Adams: Appreciate it. So we've heard from both sides here now. I don't know, it seems like there's maybe a lack of communication. We hear two different stories completely. Can you give us some background here? What's going on to try to break through this impasse?

Davis: Well, I'll tell you, I don't think it's a lack of communication as much as it is just pure politics and partisanship at play. And it's going to, unfortunately, transcend into the House Ag Committee as we open up the farm bill debate, and that's tragic. We had a bipartisan bill that we passed in 2014, saved taxpayers not the estimated 23 billion in mandatory spending, we saved taxpayers \$104 billion, and that was bipartisan success.

But I think the Democrats on the House Ag Committee—and many of them are my close friends—I think they're more worried about who's going to be in the majority next year and whether or not they can rewrite the farm bill versus working with us to do it.

Adams: Other than the nutrition title, is there agreement on pretty much the rest of the bill?

Davis: Well, I would certainly hope so because many of the same producers in my district versus producers in districts represented by my fellow Democrat members of the House Ag Committee, they have the same issues, and we've seen bipartisan success on the ag side. Frankly, I was hoping we'd just tweak a few little things on the ag side because a lot of what we've already...that we have in place is working, and working well.

So as we move into the food and nutrition debate, that's 80% of our farm bill, and that's always an area of contention. But we worked together four years ago to actually address many of the food and nutrition concerns that both sides had, and we came together in a bipartisan agreement. Chairman Conaway has been working with Collin Peterson and others in putting together plans, putting together legislation. They've had this planned announcement.

And what it is, it's actually investing more SNAP dollars into workforce development. And I think that's a good thing. Because frankly, Mike, our goal should be to get people off of SNAP rather than remaining on indefinitely. And I'm glad to fight that fight with the Democrats on the Ag Committee who think that keeping people on SNAP benefits in perpetuity is the way to go for taxpayers and for them.

Adams: So is this beyond the Ag Committee? I mean, is this pressure coming from outside of the Ag Committee? And, you know, for years we had some of this partisan politics, the Ag Committee was kind of immune to some of that, but now it seems to be part of the Ag Committee as well. Is that coming down from higher up in the Democratic Party?

Davis: You know, it certainly seems to be. I have no proof. I have no...nothing in writing that that's the case, but I don't think it's a coincidence that every member of the Ag Committee has already rejected any possible legislative changes to encourage more people to get off of SNAP benefits and into the workplace at a time where we have historic low unemployment. I don't think it's a coincidence that they're all together. I think it's... I would bet that it's coming directly from the Democrat leadership team.

I kind of feel bad for Collin Peterson. He's somebody who's a friend of mine, and we've worked together on a lot of bipartisan issues. And he represents a district that went for President Trump by double digits. So many of the concerns that the administration has are concerns of his voters too, just like they are mine.

I would hope that we would break this logjam and that the members of both parties in the House Ag Committee would get back to reality. And let's work together, because frankly, at a time when we have a lower, historic low unemployment rates and at the same time historic high rates of SNAP usage, that's not congruent. That should not be happening. We need to do something about it. And investing in those SNAP beneficiaries who need workforce training, spending extra dollars to give them that, that's the right thing to do, and that's the American thing to do, too.

Adams: What are you hearing from the groups that are involved in feeding programs and those organizations that rely upon this program to help people in need? What are they saying about the proposal?

Davis: Well, again, we don't have a legislative proposal yet. What we're saying is let's put a proposal together that's going to actually invest more SNAP dollars in getting the people that are coming to the food pantries, that are getting food assistance, getting them trained to get into a job where they don't have to get that food assistance. That's our goal. That's their goal. Their goal is to put themselves out of business. And that should be our goal on the House Ag Committee, is to get people into self-sustainment.

Now, our food and nutrition programs, and the folks who implement those programs, are going to do what they can to meet demand. But our goal as policymakers should be to reduce that demand. Nobody is talking about kicking families who need SNAP benefits off of the program at all. We are talking about investing in those families, giving them access to programs, access to community college education opportunities to get trained to get jobs that are available at facilities like Caterpillar in Decatur, Illinois, where I serve.

This is an area, a county, Mike, that had 11.5% unemployment just a year and a half ago. Now we have some of the best paying jobs in that community that are expanding into our area. And you know what Caterpillar execs tell me? They can't find people to take the jobs. That's why we've got to encourage families to get training, get off of SNAP benefits, and into good paying jobs. That also has an added benefit of getting them healthcare benefits that are some of the best in the nation, that then they don't have to rely upon subsidies or Medicaid expansion programs, which are unaffordable in many states like Illinois.

And it's the right thing to do for families. I never understand, Mike, how policymakers in Washington will want to do what they can to keep American families on benefit programs in perpetuity, forever, rather than giving them the dignity to go out and get that job and sustain themselves and their own family.

Adams: Yeah, the irony here, there's an impasse over a proposal that has not even been formally made yet. So hopefully we can work through this—

Davis: Yeah, you're right.

Adams: —and move forward. Congressman, thank you for your time. We appreciate it.

Davis: Thanks, Mike. Take care.

Adams: You too. Illinois Congressman Rodney Davis.

[End of recording.]