

Adams on Agriculture
Interview with Glenn Thompson
April 3, 2018

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

Adams: And welcome back. Time for another farm bill update. If you've been with us here on *AOA*, in the last few days you've heard from Ranking Member of the House Agriculture Committee Collin Peterson, you've heard from Chairman Mike Conaway, you've heard from another member of the committee, Rodney Davis from Illinois. Today we hear from the Vice Chairman of the House Ag Committee, Pennsylvania Congressman Glenn Thompson. Congressman, thanks for joining us on *Adams on Agriculture*.

Thompson: Well, Mike, it's a pleasure and honor to be with you today.

Adams: What can you tell us? Last we heard from Chairman Conaway, he was waiting for the CBO score to move this proposal forward on the farm bill. How close are we?

Thompson: I think we're close, and I think we need to be. As you know, the farm income has been down for at least four years, and quite frankly, the farm bill is probably the single most important piece of federal legislation that we do to make sure that we get federal agriculture policy right, and if we're doing that right, we wind up with a robust rural economy.

And we're far from that right now, and I think that's the, you know, that's what's motivating us to be proactive. You know, normally, Mike, when we would be talking about the farm bill would be six months, nine months, 12 months past the expiration date. And we're actually, this current farm bill does not expire until September 30th, or I guess October 1st technically, and so we're being proactive because we've got some needs that we need to address.

Adams: Given the calendar and the busy schedule of Congress, and the big issues that are out there, and the disagreement between Republicans and Democrats in the House and in your own committee on the nutrition title, doesn't that...that makes that September 30th date seem a lot closer.

Thompson: Well, I hope not. You know, without a robust rural economy the large majority of the population in this country which live in urban and suburban areas are going to wake up in the cold, dark and hungry, so there is a, you know, there is a motivation to do this. But I also take issue with the fact that some of my colleagues that perhaps just don't know, they've had access to the information through their leadership about the nutrition title.

In addition to being the Vice Chair of the Agriculture Committee, I do chair the Nutrition Subcommittee. I can tell you, Mike, there's nothing in this farm bill that we—in this proposal that we're going to be hopefully be marking up here, I would hope within weeks, that hasn't been thoroughly vetted over the course of four years, over 30 specific hearings related to nutrition. You know, it improves the program integrity. It modernizes the program. It does promote healthy foods.

And quite frankly, you know, for the individuals, 35% of the folks who are on the SNAP program specifically are there because of financial reasons. The other 65% are over the age of 65 and older, or under the age of 18, or quite frankly have...a person with disabilities. But for the 35% who are there temporarily because of economic distress—they're unemployed, they're under employed, maybe they've been stuck in poverty for, maybe for generations—this is an exciting bill. It doesn't do things to people, it does things for people in terms of providing them an on ramp to opportunity.

So while they're receiving the nutritional support that they and their families need, it also provides an opportunity for education and training. And we invest over a billion dollars into—and guarantee a training slot in every state for an individual who really needs, you know, they need that on road to opportunity that really only comes through skills-based education.

There's probably today somewhere around close to four million jobs that are sitting open and available. We have a skills gap. We're not talking about somebody going for a four-year degree. We're talking about a certificate, a specialization, a little better training, you know, to be able to seek that promise of greater opportunity that our country provides. And so I'm, you know, I'm very...I think as my colleagues take the opportunity to find more and more about this nutrition title, to me it's pretty exciting legislation that we're looking to advance on behalf of American families.

Adams: We're talking to Pennsylvania Congressman Glenn Thompson, Vice Chair of the House Agriculture Committee. Well, there are certainly two very different narratives being given on this farm bill. The one you just explained, and then the other side what we're hearing is all about people being kicked off the food stamp program, money cut from the program. You're talking about reinvesting. They're talking about it's going to kick people out and leave them without anything. So obviously there seems to be quite a distance between the two sides. Where do you find the common middle ground here?

Thompson: I think in being informed. Unfortunately, maybe some of my colleagues have not been provided access through their leadership to the information that was shared last year, in the fall of last year. And again, there's nothing in this new nutrition title that they haven't heard in all of the hearings. I'm very proud of Chairman Conaway. This has probably been the most

transparent process for a farm bill—seeking-- you know, the number of hearings, the information has been there.

And, you know, for example, the workforce solutions, which tend to be at the heart, I mean, we're talking about folks who are able-bodied, so people without disabilities, we're actually...it wouldn't be quite 35% of them really would be given this on ramp to opportunity, because if you're a single parent of children that are not in school yet, you would be exempted. I would hope you would have the opportunity if you would choose to pursue obviously getting the type of education and training, the skills-based education to be able to get a family sustaining job, because that's what you need.

The only people that would be leaving the program would be those who would self-select not to pursue that opportunity, but they certainly would have the choice to do that. Again, it excludes people who are disabled, excludes those who are younger than age 18, those who are 65 and older. At the same time it expands the base.

You know, we have some of our military—well, basically it adjusts, increases the minimum benefit for households with one or two members. It addresses an issue that's near and dear to my heart as an Army dad. You know, we have some who joined the military late in life, and when they come in they come in with a spouse and children.

And it's pretty tough to make it on a private's salary whenever you come in in your late 20s and 30s with a family. And so this actually addresses that issue. In the past the basic housing allowance, since with a family they tend to live off base, would disqualify them. It would count against their eligibility. We provide a, you know, this bill actually tries to take the first steps in addressing that.

You know, it's just, you know, so I'm hoping as more and more information—I'm looking forward to being, when I'm back in Washington next week, going to be spending more time on the floor talking about sharing the information that's in here. I am hoping that as more and more people see what...seize the opportunity to actually read and see what is in this nutrition title that there's going to be a strong consensus that we're just doing some really good things, not to people, but for folks.

Adams: Beyond the nutrition title, whether it's crop insurance or ARC, PLC, what else is in there that we should know? Any significant changes to the current bill?

Thompson: Well, it certainly, the things that have been working well are going to continue to be there. Crop insurance is so critically important. Farming is one of those few industries, it's so weather sensitive, so we want to make

sure that that safety net that farmers are able to buy into and be a part of is there. We've all seen what extreme weather conditions can do.

Certainly looking to strengthen the forestry title. When the last farm bill was written I actually was subcommittee chair for Conservation & Forestry, so I worked on the conservation programs, that title. I also worked on the forestry title. And we're seeing, you know, for areas—I'm from Pennsylvania, Penns Woods—certainly much of our northern tier of our country, and the southern part we have a strong forest industry, and we need that to be strong because that's how we keep our forests healthy, is through regular active management. And I think we're going to see—we're going to build on the successes of the last in the forestry title and make that even stronger.

I think there's just, there's a lot here we... There's been no cuts, any kind of efficiency savings. And it's hard to argue about doing things smarter and more efficiently. But where we've been able to gather efficiency, those dollars are being reinvested back into the farm bill. And in the end I, you know, I think it would help us achieve that purpose I see, and at least I identify with, helping to achieve a robust rural economy.

Adams: Well, we look forward to that proposal coming out soon. And good luck in trying to mend the bridges and solving this impasse on the nutrition part of it so this thing can move forward. Thank you so much.

Thompson: Mike, my pleasure. It's great to talk with you.

Adams: We look forward to talking again. Thank you, sir. Pennsylvania Congressman Glenn Thompson. He is Vice Chair of the House Agriculture Committee.

[End of recording.]