

Adams on Agriculture

Interview with House Ag Committee Ranking Member Collin Peterson

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Note: This is an unofficial transcript of a discussion with Mike Adams and House Agriculture Committee Ranking Member Collin Peterson (D., Minn.) from the *Adams on Agriculture (AOA)* radio program.

Adams: And we welcome back the Ranking Member of the House Agriculture Committee, Congressman Collin Peterson from Minnesota. Thanks for joining us again. How is the August recess going?

Peterson: Well, not too bad. It was a little hot a couple days and we need some rain up north, and we got too much rain down south, and so it's just like normal.

Adams: So when you're out talking with folks, especially farmers, what are they telling you? What's top of their minds? What...is it farm bill, is it trade? What's No. 1?

Peterson: Probably trade. Their apprehension about what's going on with the trade situation probably comes up more than anything else. But the farm bill comes up, you know, and whether we're going to get it done or not. But I guess probably the No. 1 thing is weather out here.

We just got done working with USDA to get a designation for Kittson, Lake of the Woods and Roseau County way up by the Canadian border to be able to hay their CRP. There were some glitches in the drought monitor map and so forth. And we got that released yesterday afternoon, so I was up there. There was a real shortage of hay in that area because they've been so dry, and so hopefully they'll be able to get in there and get it cut in the next couple of weeks.

Adams: Well, let's talk farm bill. How much is going on during this August recess? How much behind the scenes work is being done?

Peterson: Well, there's a lot going on. The staff's been very heavily engaged. They're working every day, all day long, and into the early evening. We had a conference call yesterday. It was the second one between the four of us, and it went well. And everybody is, you know, totally committed to getting this thing done by September 30th, so we laid out kind of where we're at and where some of the issues are. We're going to have the, apparently the public meeting is going to be on September 5th.

And we're making very good progress in a number of the titles. A number of them are close to being worked out. Chairman Conaway, I think rightly, brought up the situation that probably the two issues that are going to

require some work are going to be obviously nutrition and also conservation, and the overall money situation. So it was unclear to me how those issues are going to get resolved. But everybody says we're going to get them resolved, so we'll see what happens.

The nutrition thing, you know, which caused us a lot of problem in the House, what I'm doing with that is I'm really backing out of that whole discussion, and I've just told Chairman Conaway that whatever he can work out with the Senate is okay with me.

And I keep hearing from Senator Stabenow that what was done in the House is not going to fly with the Democrats in the Senate, and without the Democrats in the Senate they won't have a bipartisan bill, which they say they're going to have, so how that's going to get worked out is unclear, but hopefully it is. And as I said, whatever they can get the Senate to agree to, I don't see that I'll have any problem with that.

Adams: Along those lines, Senator Cornyn, the No. 2 Republican leader, said this week that he was disappointed the Senate passed bill does not include stronger reforms to SNAP. Meanwhile, Senator Doug Jones this week said that, in Alabama he said that if they try to put those onerous requirements on SNAP it will not pass and we will not get a farm bill passed. So it sounds like we're still at opposite ends on this issue.

Peterson: Well, the thing—and the vote in the Senate, the vote was 30 to 68 on this issue. And the bill passed 86 to 11. So this is what I've been telling people for a couple months, that, you know, get real, that if you want a bill, this is where it's at. And so again, if whatever the Republicans in the House can get the Senate to agree to, I don't see that I'm going to have any problem with whatever they come up with.

Now, are there reforms that I would like to see in SNAP? Yes. Were they included in the House bill? No. But that time has passed. I'm not getting in any more arguments over SNAP. Whatever they can work out with the Senate I can go along with.

Adams: We're talking with the Ranking Member of the House Agriculture Committee, Collin Peterson. What are the issues to be resolved yet on conservation?

Peterson: Well, the House made some cuts, and that's, I think, concerning to the Senate. The House has the merger of the CSP and EQIP program, which I know has concerns in the Senate. And then the CRP issue, you know, is very different in the Senate compared to the House, so I would say those are the three main issues that have to get resolved. And I'm not exactly sure how that's going to get done, but we are going to start having discussions about that, and I'm sure we can get it worked out. It's just going to take some time.

Adams: And what about the funding issue, the dollars for this?

Peterson: Well, that's, you know, going to be an issue, again, I think, between the chairman over here in the House side and the Senate because they took money from the cotton program, which, the chairman has the biggest cotton district in the country, so they took money out of the cotton program and used it to fund some things that they want in the Senate. Again, I don't know how that's going to get worked out.

But as was said yesterday, everybody that was on the call says we're going to get this done and we're going to get it done on time, so somehow or another it'll get worked out. But that's, again, not something I'm going to be that involved in.

I'm involved in dairy. That's fairly close in terms of where both of the bills are. And then the conservation, the CRP stuff, I've got some strong feelings there, and hopefully we can rein in some of these abuses that are going on in the CRP system, and we can increase the acreage. So we'll just have to see how that works out.

Adams: Is September 30th the real deadline, or is December 31st the hard deadline that you're looking at?

Peterson: No, I think for us the real deadline is September 30th, which means we have to have this worked out probably by the middle of September so we can get the drafting done and get it to the President's desk on time. But the problem is if we wait and we don't get it done by September 30th, then we've got to deal with an extension.

And that's problematic. And is it going to be an extension for a few months, or is it going to be for a year. That gets that all into questions. So that's not a good option. We need to get this done. We're all committed to getting it done. And there's no reason why we can't get it done. So we just have to work hard and work through these issues.

Adams: So you think once you get back, will this be right at the top of the list, getting this done?

Peterson: I think so. I mean, everybody that I, for us leaders on the ag committee it's the top issue. For the leadership, they've all said they want this done. McConnell wants it done, Pelosi wants it done, Schumer wants it done. I guess Paul Ryan wants it done, I don't know. So, I mean, the majority of the people involved in this have made statements that this is going to be on the top of the agenda and that this is something that has to get resolved. And hopefully it will be.

Adams: Are you optimistic?

Peterson: Yeah, I am. I think it can get done. If we don't get some people bringing in stuff that's not workable. And so we'll just have to keep plugging away and try to not get ourselves into any corners that we can't get out of, and hopefully whatever we come up with the President can sign.

But, you know, again, there's no reason why this shouldn't get done. And after the call yesterday, I think we're all committed to this, and we don't see any roadblocks at this point that are insurmountable, so I'm optimistic.

Adams: Very good. Good to hear that. Well, we'll talk again next month as we see how this develops. Thank you for the update, and enjoy the rest of the recess.

Peterson: All right. Thank you very much.

[End of recording.]