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Travis

Welcome to VJEL Talks. We are your hosts, Travis Rosenbluth

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Hope

And Hope McClellan.

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Travis

Today we are speaking with Chris Adamo and Professor John Copus about the Farm Bill and its upcoming negotiations.

00:00:11:20 - 00:00:35:01

Hope

Chris and John both worked with Senator Debbie Stabenow on the 2018 Farm Bill. Presently, Chris works as in-house counsel at Danone and John is the director of the Gardner Agricultural Policy Program at the University of Illinois. If you enjoy what you hear today, please like and subscribe to our podcast. We don't want you to miss out on the latest. Thank you for listening and learning with us today.

00:00:35:03 - 00:00:46:00

Travis

Without further ado, here's VJEL Talks. Well, I think that's a good start to where we should start is, you know, what is the Farm Bill.

00:00:46:01 - 00:00:53:15

Prof. John Copus

Have you forgotten it already? I think you took this whole class, about a year ago. Come on, you can't have forgotten it already?

00:00:53:16 - 00:01:09:02

Travis

No, of course. It's, allow me to be the advocate for the audience that otherwise has has no idea what it is. you know, I ask, you know what is the Farm Bill? I guess it's kind of asking any, person, you know, what's the meaning to life? And, you know...

00:01:09:04 - 00:01:24:22

Hope

Maybe we can synthesize the question a little more. I have not taken the Farm Bill class. and and maybe we can explain it as. What if you had to say the fundamentals of the Farm Bill. If you had to explain it to a layman, what the fundamentals of the Farm Bill are, where would you start?

00:01:24:23 - 00:02:03:05

Chris Adamo

I'm gonna let the real professor give the proper explanation of what a Farm Bill is. But, you know, the quick side note or maybe precursor to it, what a Farm Bill is to Jonathan and I, not to speak for Jonathan, but certainly with a force in our life or maybe longer than we'd like it to be. But given a given, us [...] if nothing else but, yeah, it's this thing that arises every, five years is from congress, and people like

Jonathan might fall into its traps. So we're working it in a different ways, so Jonathan why don't you give a proper explanation?

00:02:03:07 - 00:03:17:16

Prof. John Copus

Yeah. I mean, it's it is a it's typically a five year, authorization of kind of a it's like a main legislative vehicle for the federal food, agriculture, natural resources, conservation rule development space. Like It covers a vast territory. We consider it omnibus legislation because it has so many titles in different areas. and again, it's, you know, this big footprint and federal footprint in the food and agricultural space. So everything from supporting farmers, you know, through things like crop insurance and subsidies to helping low income families purchase food, put food on the table when, when times are tight. And so it covers that broad spectrum of, of issues, you know, within that kind of jurisdictional space of agriculture, food, natural resources. it is, as Adamo will attest, it's the largest federal investment in private lands, natural resource conservation. So it's a big environmental piece. I don't know. What am I missing? you know, land grant universities, a lot of agricultural research and outreach and extension work is authorized by it, as well. So we all kind of get a lot out of it, I think.

00:03:17:18 - 00:04:10:07

Chris Adamo

Maybe to add as an Omnibus Bill. For folks who don't know what that is, you can look it up. But it's basically legislation that tends to act like a magnet and grab all sorts of various policies, so that it actually passes in one public law vehicle, right? It can be, you know, generally should be under one jurisdiction of say the agriculture committee for example, which has a broad jurisdiction. But in theory, you know, anything could be attached to there. Assuming that that's what the the legislative body wants to, wants to do. So you can get a wide spectrum of policies at the end of the day. Think of Omnibus just an efficiency matter, right? It's just an efficient way for Congress to get a whole bunch of different proposals passing law at once versus having to consider all hundreds, or even thousands of different individual bills, which would be almost impossible to do from the time standpoint.

00:04:10:09 - 00:04:46:14

Travis

Yeah. I think that's, good. You know, 5000ft view of of this thing. Probably take 5000ft to see every page of it, too. But, you know, to go back to the start, the inception of this, you know, if we if we stand here in 2023 and the multi 100 billions of dollars that this thing's going to be, where did it start? was it known as the Farm Bill in the beginning? And what was the process of getting from what it was in its inception or what it might have been thought of in its inception to now?

00:04:46:16 - 00:06:45:18

Prof. John Copus

This would be. If Congress actually got the Farm Bill done in 2023, we'd mark it is as the 90th anniversary. So the first one of these was 1933, which is a very specific placement right? That makes it Great Depression era New Deal, Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, efforts to combat the Great Depression, particularly for agriculture. So when it was first authorized, it was very narrow. It was basically a few major commodities, like corn, cotton and wheat. and the whole goal was to help farmers who were going under in the depression, who were losing their farms, losing, livelihoods. And so, you know, but part of the argument is you want a good, healthy base of agricultural production, free food supply. And obviously in the depression that was that was a concern. So it really dates to that. the modern Farm Bill, kind of, you know, multi title omnibus was built up over time. And really it's probably in the 70s, the early 70s when we brought together the food assistance and and the commodity supports, the 80s brought in conservation.

So you kind of see this build over time. as we add different. To Adamo's point, it becomes kind of an efficiency thing, where we got to authorize this and we got to reauthorize that. And so you start rolling them together. And for people who like, you know, really torture themselves and look at legislative text, it's not the most, enjoyable reading because it's, you know, you have a thousand pages of legislative text that's touching on statutes all over the place. Right? So it's a lot of... This is what we'd call cut and bite now and then, seven U.S.C. 1508 with this one. Right. And it just it's a lot of that stuff. But but it really is, has really built up over those nine decades and branched out from what is very, was once very narrow farm support to this very broad, set of policies.

00:06:45:20 - 00:06:56:14

Chris Adamo

I mean, Jonathan, isn't it true we're still enacting policy, our US Department of Agriculture still, implementing policy from statutes that were originally drafted on the 30s right?

00:06:56:16 - 00:07:28:00

Prof. John Copus

We are still, you know, yeah. I mean, most of that is kind of faded out, but like, the everybody's favorite deadline, like, oh, if we don't reauthorize title one, the commodity subsidies, you know, will revert to permanent law, which is from the 30s and 40s. and so each Farm Bill suspends that permanent law for the five years, which is kind of a strange mechanism supposed to, you know, force Congress to act. but it also is just kind of an oddity, it's history.

00:07:28:06 - 00:08:50:17

Travis

And so one of the, the key frameworks that was provided by both of you in the class, which I think is the, you know, the two sides of the Farm Bill, which is, you know, whether it's it's kind of the idea that, you know, good intentions or, you know, the, the, the chaos is on the path of good intentions or what have you. But, there are there are people within that make those decisions. And if I, if I may quote, it's the, from an author, saying that "although the Farm Bill coalition has programs that are rooted in the Great Depression and the New Deal, it was the farm interests that formed a coalition first", and that author being one, Professor John Coppess in his own writings. But, you know, I love, you know, because I think that is something that is can speak a lot to today. And how we got here is the idea of coalition building, negotiations, hard politics. And, you know, as, as we look into the different portions of the Farm Bill, it does tell a story of how you see the different, monies going to different areas, when in fact, you know, the bill itself says it's supposed to go to the farm and and Hope is our environmental justice, editor here.

00:08:51:16 - 00:08:53:03

Hope

I was going to add on to your question.

00:08:53:04 - 00:08:54:15

Travis

Please do. Yeah.

00:08:54:17 - 00:09:54:11

Hope

So something that I focus on and something, that Travis mentioned is environmental justice. and, and Mr Adamo and I were speaking prior to when you joined the call. Professor Copus about, where we're from. I'm from a small farming town in Michigan. and it and, something that I unfortunately don't know a whole

lot about is the law surrounding agriculture, but something that I am curious about is, what are the predictions that we're seeing around how the Farm Bill is going to affect farming communities? And, and Travis mentioned this, like coalition building, and things like that. So if you could explain a little bit how that coalition, the coalition building, has kind of like brought in these different viewpoints and how the Farm Bill maybe potentially addresses those viewpoints or doesn't? I know it's kind of a wide framed question, but I'll give you the space to answer it however you think works the best for you.

00:09:54:13 - 00:11:36:10

Prof. John Copus

I mean, that is a that is a big question and probably one, you know, Chris... probably one of the lessons we learned, painfully and importantly and then continue to try to understand it better as we go about our work, which is this just building over time? But really the maintenance of this coalition. So really getting, from the farm gate. So that's the things, you know, you, you asked about farm basing on it. Crop insurance and subsidy programs and conservation, really directed at a subgroup of farmers, all the way up to the food assistance provisions, which will, you know, help poor low income families in rural communities and in the cities and metropolitan areas. So it has that very broad reach, which means it has a broad coalition. I mean, you have districts in in places like Detroit, Michigan, who would otherwise probably not see a direct connection to a farm subsidy payment, but would see a direct connection to, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance, the low income Food Assistance Program. And then in a somewhat direct, you know, a less direct but not completely disconnected to conservation, clean water, clean air, soil erosion issues and so forth. and so that does bridge, I think, from the smaller towns, the farms and rural communities all the way up, you know, you're drinking water in a small town. It's going to come out of sources that may ask to deal with nutrient pollution or runoff right? Soil erosion problem. So so it does connect across a lot of that, which is where the, you know, where you're building your coalition. So what interests are coming into that, into that discussion? has a big part of it.

00:11:36:12 - 00:15:02:14

Chris Adamo

Yeah. let me just add, I mean, I think in the, the modern context and, Jonathan, I would talk about this in class. Certainly we talk about, John we just did this, like we talk about the coalition right? Like there's the singular entity or a singular organized structure to stakeholders. That's not, that's not true. Right? I mean, this... We're using that term loosely to represent a group of human being stakeholders that span a wide scope, who end up supporting the ultimate bill for one reason or another. They may not support every ounce in it, but they, yet there's something in there important enough for them where they're going to say "Yes" at the Farm Bill right? So that... This coalition that we're referencing is just this wide spectrum of different people with different interests that ultimately want this thing passed into law. But to Jonathan's earlier point, you know, the ori... Who's the original coalition or who's the primary coalition, I guess is in the eyes of the beholder right? There may be different opinions and views and perspective of that. But going back to Jonathan's original point in the 30s, it started from a farm safety net first stand point right?. Like, let's make sure those farmers have a livelihood. Let's make sure the American consumer has continuity of safe and affordable food supply, all that good stuff. But there's ecosystem of stakeholders that comes alive every five years or so. to, to lobby and advocate for different things. And they're not necessarily all talking to each other right? Let's be clear. And they don't necessarily, In fact, I guarantee you both don't agree with each other on, you know, I don't know, 75, 90% of what's going on in the debate. But, you know, it'd be. So it's almost think of it as a landscape or a map of all these different human being interests, that are coming together. And let's also be clear, some ultimately don't like the end product. Some ultimately say "Hey don't pass this Farm Bill". So it's really this wild ecosystem that I think what, Jonathan and I tried to express in the class over the last decade that this ecosystem continues, at least in modern time, over the last couple decades, to grow. There are some new faces, there's some

new voices, there's the new name that show up every couple years for the next debate. And and there's a new ideas, new policy. There's new societal challenges that they're trying to, reflect in the policy debate. And some come away with progress and others may come away with some disappointments, because that's just the pains and growing struggles of becoming a new voice in this massive policy. I mean, I like to joke and Jonathan you may remember that when we were working on the Hill, you know, you're from a farm family. I am I'm from a flower family. urban flower family. Not a rule farming family. So I always felt like we used to joke. I'm an interloper to this conversation, right? I'm the environmental guy coming at it from the Great Lakes standpoint back in the day. And that's we made that case and [...] still to this day, make this case that conservation is important for farming livelihood. But it's also important for the broader just anybody living in the state of Michigan, for example, that enjoys fresh, clean water, for example, right? and that's right. That that 100%. I, you know, I used to make that argument. So I believe in that. But, you know, to some, you know, some the kid who grew up in Detroit, I'm an interloper to that conversation, so it is very much in the eye of the beholder. Who's the coalition? Who's who's the voice that the politic representing?

00:15:02:16 - 00:16:50:19

Prof. John Copus

I agree with a large portion of that. I would not consider, Chris Adamo on interloper, nor anybody whose interests are built around conservation and environmental concerns, because it very much is the thing that touches from the farm gate to the community, and to the cities. It was also the one area I think you and I agreed on more often than not, which is, you know, rare for two lawyers on a committee staff. but it was it is a huge component. And I think this the maintenance of the coalition is one of the greatest challenges that you have in this. The different views from farm groups are quite striking at times. And so they don't agree. So even the smallest part of the faction doesn't agree with each other. The smallest part of the coalition. so that's a big part of it. and, and I would just add, also... Particular as a pitch to students who may who may or may not, you know, see themselves as an interloper or as somebody who wants to get into this wonderful mess. The need for new voices, new perspectives and frankly, creativity is absolutely vital. I mean, these policies and we're seeing it now, frankly, really stalemate when you hear it just from the same groups over and over, wanting the same things, that usually means they just want more of what they had before, and that doesn't really get to the point of policy. And so, we I always, you know, whether students here at U of I or up at Vermont Law School, if you have an inkling of an interest in this, this is a great place to work on policy very directly, and it is always desperately needing new voices and creativity on this stuff. So I highly encourage, and so you get an inkling of an interest, get involved with it. It's it's a lot of, it touches a lot of areas, and it's fun, by all means. It may be crazy, but it's fun.

00:16:50:19 - 00:17:39:03

Chris Adamo

And, you know, while perhaps, you know, again, in the eye of the beholder here, how much change has actually incurred over the last decade or two. But I think in Jonathan and I's time, Jonathan, I don't know what year you started. But I, you know, 2005 / 2006 I started engaging in it. 2008 was my first Farm Bill, where I met... and Jonathan and I met during that course that period. But since then there have been some significant changes right? Maybe it's not perfect for some or not enough for others, but, by all means, there's been a lot of changes going on in the last four plus, Farm Bills that we've experienced. And hopefully we've expressed some of that in class, but it's, there are trend undoubted, unmistakable trends happening here. and it because of these new stakeholder that are coming into the debate.

00:17:39:06 - 00:17:56:09

Hope

What do you think is fundamental about the Farm Bill for somebody to understand that lives in a rural community, low income community? What is important for them to know about the Farm Bill so that they can participate and be proactive in their own communities?

00:17:56:15 - 00:18:06:12

Prof. John Copus

The whole thing boils down to food. and that's why I think it matters to a large swath of people. Chris, I didn't mean to cut you off..

00:18:06:12 - 00:19:35:14

Chris Adamo

No that's perfect. I think that, you know, here to boil it down to one thing, no matter who you are, a little bit rural farm, non-farm, environmentalist, not environmentalist, whatever it may be, it does come down to food. So what do you want out of that food supply? What do want out of that food system? That's what the debate ended up being about. But it is ultimately at the end of the day about securing a stable, steady, affordable, hopefully sustainable food supply. And let's be honest, those definitions are going to vary a little bit from stakeholder to stakeholder. But that that's what it's about one way or the other. and so, you know, there's at the end of the day, the current policy and the current debate has these sets of tools. If you think about policies as tools or lever to enact certain change. It could be about getting a new fire engine for a rural community, I mean, truly,. Or helping that rural health care provider, a rural waterway system you know, how... These are their financing mechanism in the rural development title that help rural communities to do all those things. So, but for Farm Bill legal authority and the money that comes with it, rural communities wouldn't have those basic necessities assistance you know, for them. So, just, those are just some examples, obviously. and then of course, the and I just gave that an array of non-food, of course. But again, those are oftentimes the theory being that those rural communities are somehow involved in, in agriculture, somehow involved in farming. Of course, they can be involved in other economic activities too. But but that's kind of a nexus a little bit.

00:19:35:15 - 00:21:23:02

Travis

I'd love to continue on this idea of the framework for upcoming law students, as this is a law school podcast that want to get into policy. you know, you look you look forward to not just this election, but the upcoming elections in the future, increasing cost spending, new coalitions that are still finding their ways. I think currently they are building, and then the, the other... The current gatekeepers of the Farm Bill, particularly the CBO score, the kind of, zero, you know, the the winners and losers of the Farm Bill. As an upcoming policy maker or law student. Where, where how to how to think of engaging into this now? Are the previous gatekeepers of the Farm Bill, allowing the flexibility to make it something that works going forward? Because I feel like that, sort of Damocles, if you will, is that increasing money spent on this bill that is called the Farm Bill. Little amounts are going to the farm. Little amounts are going to conservation. A large portion of that is going towards the snap portion of it, which obviously has allowed a... maybe it's a little hyperbolic, but at least a cease fire an uneasy peace between the coalitions, you know, is this a ticking time bomb, or is there something that allows new students and policymakers to to keep this thing going forward to help out agricultural policies?

00:21:23:04 - 00:24:14:22

Chris Adamo

I think there's multiple issues you're raising in here, maybe multiple ways that we can go about this. But let me pick one thing that you're saying. I'm not going to try to answer or respond to the full statement yet. The notion that there are gatekeepers, whether those are congressional gatekeepers or Department of Agriculture gatekeepers, I think that's a false notion, let me just start there. I mean, certainly they have a role to... USDA has a role to implement the law, obviously. Congress has a role to oversee that law. And then Congress has a role to, you know, revamp right through its process and amended. But I do have a fundamental belief that while an imperfect the petitions are fairly relatively transparent, relatively open, there's no prerequisite. Like you don't need a law degree to go have that be a part of it. Let's just start there, right? As an example. I think a law degree can help obviously make you a better advocate. I do believe that, but but they're certainly tonnes of non-lawyers who great advocates right? So I think if you want to be an advocate, either to the agency or to Congress or to bowl, I think there is a if you think of that advocacy platform as an analogy to a courtroom, you're taking an argument to those gatekeepers, those custodians of the law, the custodians of the the policy debate. And how good of an argument are you going to bring? Is the question, right? How persuasive is your case that you're making, albeit a very informal process compared to, say, proper litigation? You're still building a case. Your case is going to be based on various rationale, precedent and how many actor witnesses you're bringing to the table in turn, and in the expert witnesses would now be you're constituencies. Who are you bringing? Who are these stakeholders you're bringing with you? Right. Those are all. And I just kind of rattled off a couple. I'm sure we could dive in deeper. What is good advocacy. But I think it's a... either it's ripe frankly and I think if Jonathan and I prepped we probably could come up with examples of relatively new advocacy, groups or individuals that have brought a bigger voice to the Farm Bill debate. And certainly the EPA, they may not always be welcome. Sometimes they may be tensions with the new voices, with other stakeholders. But but by and large, there is a huge opportunity for our government to hear the case for new policy and different policy position, without a doubt. And I've seen... I think Jonathan and I have both seen, in our time in government. We've seen, you know, relatively, strong advocates and relatively weak advocates and, and there's different reasons for that. But, but but they're all there. but you ultimately and it's not easy, frankly, let's be honest, it is an uphill climb for new policy. But, if you want to make that your career, there's a space for you.

00:24:15:00 - 00:27:05:06

Prof. John Copus

Yeah. And I would add to that, I think the gatekeeper analogy is interesting, in part because there's a there's a part of us argue that the gatekeepers are only there if you let them right? if people shy away from this, if new voices or whatnot shy away from this because, you know, we think that, you know, certain interests just have a lock down on it. Well, that's self-fulfilling. I mean, of course then they're going to have a lock down. And I mentioned this earlier about the need for creative policy. just one very specific example. If we allow this to continue to stalemate around the subsidy system, you know, we're pouring more and more money into smaller, fewer farmer, excuse me, fewer farmers who are in larger and more sophisticated and are getting older. And we even if we think about 90 years of this stuff, this policy that is built around the idea that we want our food supply to be somewhat secure, there is a huge risk out there that what happens in ten years when when these farmers, many of whom are in their 60s and 70s now, and where are the new farmers? Who's getting involved in this, what food production possibilities are we missing out on? You know, you say climate change issues and our food supply coming out of places with little bits of water, like Arizona. How is it that we are using the policy to transition and to adapt? None of that happens if you believe the gatekeepers sort of run the show and there's nothing you can do about it, there's nothing more self-fulfilling and self-defeating than that concept because they will. Look, if you left it to the devices of one faction, they're going to capture as much of that they can and hold on to it for as

long as they can. So I think it's important, particularly for students who look at this and see avenues for climate change and environmental justice or food justice. The power of food issues is enormous. So you find your way through this kind of vehicle, and if you don't, you've just you've kind of ceded the entire thing over to, to those who were already in it. So I do think that part is extraordinarily important. You know, no matter how steep that hill may look, you gotta start climbing it. And people have to do so. Otherwise it you know, we don't get anywhere. So I stress that part of it. Travis you mentioned things like Congressional Budget Office or CBO and baseline, you know, these are challenges that layer into this, but they're also opportunities to be creative, to push these things. and again, I come back to this idea of young farmers or new farmers and new farming opportunities, entrepreneurial opportunities in the food space. That's where we need to be investing. And so finding ways to get in there and thinking about how you can turn this dial on this program or revisit, revamp this other program to get that kind of assistance is absolutely necessary. and it's frankly, a lot more interesting than just doing the same thing over and over again.

00:27:05:08 - 00:28:31:15

Chris Adamo

Travis, if I can go back to the other piece of your of your question statement, and Jonathan, you'll probably find something disagreeable., what I say here, which you should, avoid . But, you know, I struggle with the assumption by some that and I'm not sure, Travis correct me if I'm wrong, if I'm going the wrong direction here. But, you know, this assumption that just by combining Snap and say farm subsidies, that one of those camps loses out. We had legislative time for both you know? Yeah you could probably do a deeper dive and you could maybe you know, Congress could think about... have capacity, frankly, to go through more policies, you know, on both sides frankly. But Jonathan I... you know, the budgets are finite, right? There's only so many dollars to go around. But on the other hand, there's not real strong precedent or one faction taking massive dollars from the other, if anything. And I think the statistics would prove me right on this over the last, say since 1985 Farm Bill, at the at least like both of those just... let's just take ad subsidies in the aggregate and snap in the aggregate. Both have increased over time. Now at what rate? I don't know, Jonathan. You may recall but both have grown. One has not grown at the expense of the other. I don't think.

00:28:31:17 - 00:31:47:16

Prof. John Copus

No I mean, I agree with you on that. They're not using, they're not taking funds one across the title from the other right? So if Snap's funding something on nutrition assistance, funding increases, it doesn't draw from title one commodity subsidies or vice versa. So I agree with that. And I also agree, Chris, that and this is just from the vote counting perspective, the politics of, getting legislation through Congress. This coalition is nearly unbeatable if it's functioning, right? You hit such a broad swath of the American electorate and interest spectrum for this jurisdiction, right? You you do not lose on the House and Senate floor if you have a good functioning coalition. So where maybe Chris and I and I don't think we depart on this that where I would sort of want to emphasize is the functioning part of that. It isn't a it isn't necessarily the dollars and the budget numbers that are conflicting. It's a political issue. It's very much a conflict around political ideological aspects and priorities. And so where Snap runs into the most trouble is, is the fact that it serves over 40 million Americans, and that has a huge cost to it relative to, say, a few hundred thousand farmers receiving subsidies. Right? So there's a big difference based on the constituency it serves. And if we allow the politics of it to just narrow to, you know, what is CBO, the Congressional Budget Office think the program has got to spend? Well, we've limited pretty drastically the window of what policy needs. You know, one of things we always talk about in class is you got to remember, and it's tough to do it in the thick of these fights and arguments and debates and deliberations. There are people on the other end of these policies and thinking about that sometimes, I think, might help us in our debates

if we didn't always forget that for some basic numbers and some simple talking points. but they don't draw funds from each other. And I think Chris is right, that in a functioning coalition, they all benefit. Now, I get that there's also concerns about deficit spending. And I get there's concerns about the massive amount of federal debt that we carry, the debt load that we carry, with higher interest rates. I understand all that, but you're not going to solve it on a Farm Bill. I mean, this is less than 2% of the federal budget. What are we spend in the Farm Bill is a fraction of defense spending. It's a fraction of the, the total deficits every year. So it isn't, you know, you cannot pretend or pose to be like this fiscal responsible person and focus on this one sliver, like, so that misses the debate. And then it gets even worse if you miss out on the people on the other end of what is the cost long term, if somebody can't put food on the table, what's their health care cost going to be? What is that worth? If we you know, if we blow away soils for the next ten years, what's the long term cost of that to get that back? Those sort of things are massive that we miss if we if we're just, you know, sort of running into this budget wall blindly. and that always drives me nuts. I get so tired of this. Like poser fiscal conservative who won't touch 98% of it, but boy we're going to hit this one really hard. We're going to we're going to prove it. Like, well, great. What did you just accomplish? That was my soapbox moment. I won't do that to you again.

00:31:47:16 - 00:32:59:16

Travis

Oh, no, by all means. That's what podcasts are for. It's the long form ability to each individually take a soapbox moment. and I, you know, the question that then arises going forward is, the future of the Farm Bill. You guys, was the 2018 Farm Bill with Senator Stabenow. If you could take us back then and look at the landscape that you both entered into. and then looking at the Farm Bill now, which should be negotiated here in a couple months, I believe. but then in the next three years, and the landscape that young policymakers or law students that would want to get into the Senate ad committee would be facing, you know, the the, is there or is there a Farm Bill debate in ten years time? is there a Farm Bill? Is it going to be a spending bill that is is going to be renamed and and then readjusted for something else? So I'd love for you both to take time in the last question here. And, answer that the best you can for some of the, some onlookers that might be interested in this field.

00:32:59:18 - 00:35:54:11

Chris Adamo

I'll just kick it off. I mean, you know, Jonathan lets think back 2007 / 2008 I was new to the process, I wasn't probably thinking as big picture then as I would have been later. But you know, we had an economic upheaval at the time going on a bit of, bit of an issue there. I don't know how much that actually affected that Farm Bill. Thinking back, it was probably more, you know what, what was the price of corn? What was what was the disaster? You know, drought, water, things like that happening. But these are the factors every Farm Bill has to consider, right? Can impact the voices and the strength of the voice. You know, what the economy doing overall, what the farm economy look like with different commodity prices being left [...], and you can have and I remember that, Jonathan, in 2012, 2013 we had, correct me if I'm wrong, that certain commodity prices were strong, relatively strong corn was through the roof. So cash with high right in the in pocket of most farmers. However you had pockets of the country where drought was becoming a really serious concern. I'm thinking California or maybe the other parts out west. You had high water, I think prevent plant was an issue in certain parts of the northern plains. So there were pockets we'll call natural resource and disaster issues, and challenges. 2011 2012. You're also coming off the Great Recession again, where snap enrollment was relatively high, if I remember correctly, maybe coming down a little bit, tapering down over those years. And then the real big driver, frankly, was the political driver with the newly elected, conservative health director that at the time and we had a Democratic Senate and, of course, President Obama, the split government. But that that newly elected conservative government, Republican government in the House, I mean, they wanted debt deficit

reduction. They want debt, reduction. So that drove a large part of the development of the 2014 Farm Bill. How were we going to have a net spending reduction in that Farm Bill? And then still create some innovative policies to address, improve nutrition, improve conservation performance, and improved, frankly, not, disaster relief, you know, for lack of a better word or whether through crop insurance or Jonathan we had this fun fight that you were mostly the driving around supplemental disaster relief or whether or not that were permanent bond, you know. So those were the big pieces. Those are kind of, that's your basic... there can be other thing, but that's your big checklist and hot item that are going to drive ultimately most Farm Bills right now and probably for the future as well. And it always something new. Climate change, right? Let's say climate change, even though it's not new, it's a bigger driver. And you know, a big driver... Relatively a big driver in the 2018 Farm Bill. And I think this Farm Bill, obviously we passed the IRA, we had a climate smart, initiative. The USDA climate change is as a big and rightly so. As big as ever been in a Farm Bill discussion.

00:35:54:13 - 00:37:43:11

Prof. John Copus

Yeah. And I mean, I'll put a finer point on this. If there's any lessons out of this from history, it's a foreign I hate to break this, maybe to some of our small government, acolytes that it even if you eliminated the Farm Bill this go around, my guess, is that the challenges facing society would mean we're bringing it back fairly soon thereafter. You know, maybe it looks different whatnot. But the reality is this bill, for all of its challenges, the issues and the concerns and many critiques that that it earns, hits a lot of purpose and a lot of needs in society. So food needs, conservation needs. And I think Chris is actually right with climate change, we haven't even begun to fully contemplate what food and agriculture looks like given what is coming at us. you know, water loss out west, the wildfire, like how wildfires are impacting things like these things are are crazy changes. And we've built our entire society on our ability to feed ourselves. And so we have got to figure these things out. And I think the policy continues. So for students looking ahead, you know, the simple answer is I would bet heavily there's a Farm Bill process and debate in 2028 or 2029, whatever. You know, five years from whenever this one gets done, ten years from now, probably the same thing I think is highly unlikely, given what reality looks like both politically and and, on the ground that that something some version of this doesn't continue. I just, I don't I'm not somebody who thinks that this is you know, you got to just toss this all in the garbage can. And it's an artifact of history, and there's just too many touch points in society for this, for these policies.

00:37:43:13 - 00:40:14:18

Chris Adamo

Yeah. Let me let me build on that. too a little bit, coz then this is something we talk about in class where make the case that even though we make we're talking about this five year piece of legislation, it's a bit of a misnomer. This is not... we don't... people don't sit around and wait for the green light to start debating Farm Bill every five years, right? If you're a real advocate, if you're a real practitioner, if you're really into one of these, areas the policies. You're doing this full time, whether there's the Farm Bill being passed or not, you're advocating at USDA, you're responding to rules, you're responding to policy guidance, you're trying to create policy guidance, you're applying for grants, whatever it may be, whatever part of that you're working on, you're engaged with, not just federal DC, but there's probably a state government or a state chapter of the USDA that you're working through as well. Depending on the regional issue, it could be Snap, it could be NRCS, it could be rule development, whatever it is. FSA so, you know, this is a full time job. You know, if you're really into this and frankly, what what what I think more and more good advocates are doing are capturing the real world experiences and challenges that are going on at farm country or rural America and then building pilot or building new ways of doing this and enacting that policy and then taking those experiences to Congress. And saying "See look, this is how we're doing it better. If you just tweak the law, we can do more of this at scale". That that good advocacy. That's good. policy

building. If you're taking those real life example than putting it into the formal process. So, you know that that kind of point one and sorry to be long winded, but just one other piece to that which, you know, thinking five, ten years out. And Jonathan, maybe that's just, us getting older and more experienced, but I but I also think there's probably an empirical evidence. I just don't have it, that much of the debate now is not taking place every five years. It's taking a place in the rule making is taking place at OMB, at the White House taking place, you know, at the state and regional level. And, you know, taking place in annual appropriation bill. You know, if you've got if you're playing the game well, you're not waiting for a Farm Bill. You're going through the appropriation bill that take... That, guess what? Appropriation bills, they should get passed every year. Sometimes they get a little delayed. Sometimes we may close the government here and there, but budget bills get passed and, you know, you if you're smart and you really make the case that something's needed now you can get policy. You can get policy change.d Although to a limited extent, an Appropriation bill, so the policy game is not every five years the policy game, you can look for all these different letter to and act whatever you view as a better policy guide.

00:40:14:20 - 00:41:41:18

Prof. John Copus

There's a lot to be done. And then I would add as well, if you show up on the year of reauthorization, you're too late. You know, working now, you're much of the thinking.. At least then in the conversations I've been in, is looking at 2028. Not that you're giving up on 2023, but you figure that the odds of getting major things through now. And so, Chris, is point is absolutely key. It's a building process. It's an iterative process. It is going through things like pilot, efforts to have lessons learned to deliver up to Congress. It is in the research space you know, you know, we're looking at ways in which you can, get that information from research out and plugged into the into the policy debate years down the road, and not just, you know, oh, crap, it's a Farm Bill year. We got to do something right. That's the most effective way to do it. This is an ongoing issue because it is policy. This is not a static undertaking. So I agree on that whole heartedly. And I think I would just, you know, make this play again. There is no shortage of work or need, in this space there. I cannot imagine anybody looking at this who's just going to come out bored and struggling to find something to work on. It's there. And if they do struggle and their bored, give me a call. We'll find something There's just that there is a deep, deep well of need and things to do..

00:41:41:22 - 00:42:01:07

Travis

Yeah. Well I think that was great, gentlemen. And I think that's a great place to end it. So I thank you for your time. thank you for engaging in this conversation. thank you for being on VJEL Talks. And, until next time. Until next Farm Bill maybe, you know, at some point, hopefully this conversation continues on till then.

00:42:01:09 - 00:42:02:17

Chris Adamo

Anytime Travis, it's been a pleasure

00:42:02:19 - 00:42:09:23

Prof. John Copus

Yeah. it's great to see you again. Really appreciate having us on. And, any time. This was fun.

00:42:10:00 - 00:42:10:13

Chris Adamo

Excellent.

