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APPROPRIATIONS:

House Agriculture bill guts farm bill energy programs -- advocates

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The House's fiscal 2016 draft spending bill for agriculture would cut at least \$28 million from mandatory farm bill programs aimed at promoting renewable energy, fuels and materials, two groups said yesterday.

Through changes in mandatory programs, better known as "CHIMPs," the House Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee shrank the funding provided in the 2014 farm bill for the Rural Energy for America Program from \$50 million to \$35 million, a 30 percent cut. The budget for the Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP), which helps farmers grow grasses and other perennial crops for energy, would decline from \$25 million to \$12 million, a 52 percent decrease. To compare, USDA spent \$243 million on BCAP in 2009 and 2010 ([Greenwire](#), June 18, 2014).

"The House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee has CHIMPed the farm bill by deeply cutting mandatory funding for farm energy programs passed just last year," said Andy Olsen, a senior policy advocate with the Environmental Law and Policy Center.

Congress added an energy title to the farm bill in 2002.

"Such reductions in the mandatory funding levels that Congress previously set will undermine the ongoing effectiveness of these programs," said Lloyd Ritter, co-director of the Agriculture Energy Coalition, a consortium of organizations and companies representing renewable energy, energy efficiency and bio-based products interests.

The programs were already cut by nearly half in the 2014 farm bill, said Olsen. Traditionally, energy programs have enjoyed bipartisan support, but the tightening of the budget belt during the last several years has led to dwindling spending on what were once noncontroversial measures, Olsen said.

"There's a lot of new wrinkles with the ag appropriations this year," he said.

It's unclear how much is being cut from the Biorefinery, Renewable Chemical and Biobased Product Manufacturing Assistance Program, which provides loan guarantees for the construction and retrofitting of commercial-scale biorefineries to make plant-based fuels and chemicals, said Olsen and Paul Winters, a spokesman for the Agriculture Energy Coalition. The Bioenergy Program for Advanced Biofuels was not cut at all.

The subcommittee passed the \$20.65 billion spending bill yesterday by voice vote. The bill includes cuts to conservation and agriculture research ([E&ENews PM](#), June 18).

The bill also includes a policy rider that would prevent USDA from making a decision on its upcoming dietary guidelines based on the environmental footprint of foods ([E&E Daily](#), Feb. 26). It additionally includes a policy rider to delay the implementation of conservation compliance, which requires farmers who receive

federal crop insurance to partake in soil and wetland conservation practices.

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