



Lawmakers crafting a sweeping farm bill in 2008 promised it would cut government payments to wealthy farmers. Two years later, little appears to have changed.

Data being made public Wednesday shows that the wealthiest farmers in the country are still receiving the bulk of government cash, despite claims from lawmakers that reforms in the bill would put more money in the hands of smaller farms. At the same time, a series of exemptions written into the bill has made it more difficult for the public to find out who is receiving what.

Lawmakers writing the \$290 billion bill included several provisions aimed at cutting down on government subsidies to the wealthiest farmers. They sought to eliminate a loophole that allowed farmers to collect higher payments and they set income limits for those who received subsidies. Though those new laws may have cut down on payments to some farmers, others have been able to find ways around them.

Such subsidies to the nation's largest farms are a mainstay of congressional politics and an eternal frustration to those who want to eliminate them. A powerful coalition of farm-state members of Congress have successfully defended their constituents' interests in farm bill after farm bill.

"They are well dug in," says Ken Cook, head of the Environmental Working Group, a Washington advocacy group that has long pushed for more equitable distribution of farm subsidies. "They have a strong interest in defending the status quo."

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