

USDA Secretary Suggests Possible Two-Year Farm Bill Extension

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By Bill Tomson

The U.S. Department of Agriculture may have to recommend a two-year extension to the current farm bill if Congress can't produce a new unified bill that President George W. Bush would be willing to sign, Agriculture Secretary Ed Schafer said Wednesday.

Lawmakers and the Bush administration are close to finalizing an agreement on how to fund a new farm bill, Schafer said, but there is still a wide disagreement on farm subsidy reforms that the USDA has proposed, he said.

The 2002 farm bill was originally set to expire in October 2007, but Congress has passed short-term extensions while it continues to work on a replacement bill. The latest extension runs out on April 18.

Bush previously has talked about a one-year extension of the 2002 farm bill, but Schafer said he believed it might be best to stretch that to two years if a long-term extension is needed.

It would of course, Schafer said, be much more preferable to just finish a new 2008 farm bill now because the 2002 version is outdated. There would be a lot of money to help out fruit and vegetable farmers, promote renewable fuel production and fund farm conservation in a 2008 bill, he said.