



Will Dole, Daschle provide hints to Harkin's farm bill proposal?

Sara Wyant, Editor, Agri-Pulse

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Former Senate leaders Tom Daschle and Bob Dole suggested some familiar themes last week: the nation's agriculture policy should be reformed, farmers should invest in renewable energy and everyone should become more dependent on the marketplace. In a conference call with reporters on Tuesday, Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Tom Harkin noted that their report, **"Competing and Succeeding in the 21st Century: New Markets for American Agriculture"** contains "some of the very things I've been talking about" for the next farm bill.

Daschle and Dole proposed **eliminating direct payments to farmers but retaining counter-cyclical payments, which pay farmers only when prices are low.** The also suggested that farmers be encouraged to take part in emerging markets such as renewable fuels. The former senators said their proposals could mean a net savings of \$4.48 billion. **"If we're going to have a farm bill this year, we have to demonstrate that the farm bill can be written at a reduced cost to taxpayers,"** Daschle said.

The report recommends a strategy that would result in a savings to taxpayers by reducing commodity payments with the increased farm income from new energy markets. The strategy would retain the economic stability provided by countercyclical payments and would create a permanent disaster assistance program from the savings. The report also promotes several conservation programs and calls for nationwide implementation of the Conservation Security Program. The report can be viewed at <http://www.21stcenturyag.org/>.

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