

BLOCK GRANT ASSISTANCE ACT OF 2023

MAY 22, 2023.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union and ordered to be printed

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania, from the Committee on Agriculture, submitted the following

R E P O R T

[To accompany H.R. 662]

[Including cost estimate of the Congressional Budget Office]

The Committee on Agriculture, to whom was referred the bill (H.R. 662) to amend the Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2023 to improve disaster relief funding for agricultural producers, and for other purposes, having considered the same, reports favorably thereon without amendment and recommends that the bill do pass.

BRIEF EXPLANATION

This legislation, as reported out of Committee, provides the Secretary of Agriculture the authority to make block grants to States and territories in order to distribute certain disaster assistance under the Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations, 2023.

PURPOSE AND NEED

Beginning with the enactment of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 and via subsequent legislation, Congress has appropriated additional funding to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to assist producers who suffered production losses in calendar years 2017 through 2022 due to extreme weather events and natural disasters. Legislation for losses in 2017 through 2021 provided explicit discretionary authority to the Secretary of Agriculture to deliver assistance via block grants to States and territories. This authority was omitted from the Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2023 which funded disaster assistance for losses in calendar year 2022. Making block grants to States is

an option USDA has successfully utilized in the past to deliver disaster relief.

SECTION-BY-SECTION

Section 1. Short title

The Block Grant Assistance Act of 2023

Section 2. Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2023 amendment

Section 2 amends title I of the Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations, 2023 to give the Secretary of Agriculture the authority to provide for the distribution of the disaster assistance made available through division N of the Act through the use of block grant agreements with eligible States and territories.

COMMITTEE CONSIDERATION

I. HEARING

On March 28, 2023, the Committee on Agriculture convened a hearing entitled “For the purpose of receiving testimony from The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack, Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture.” In testimony and in response to questions related to supplemental disaster funding, Secretary Vilsack noted that the Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2023 did not include the authority for USDA to provide assistance in the form of block grants to states, as had been included in previous Acts.

II. FULL COMMITTEE

On May 11, 2023, the Committee on Agriculture met pursuant to notice, with a quorum present, to consider H.R. 662, Block Grant Assistance Act of 2023. Chairman Thompson made an opening statement, as did Ranking Member Scott. Without objection, H.R. 662 was placed before the Committee for consideration, a first reading of the bill was waived, and it was open for amendment at any point. The Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities, Risk Management, and Credit was discharged from further consideration of the legislation.

Representative Kat Cammack of Florida and Representative Darren Soto of Florida were both recognized and spoke in support of the bill. Representative Jim Costa of California was recognized, and engaged in a colloquy with Chairman Thompson and Representative Cammack and each pledged to work together on this issue in the future. No further discussion occurred, and without objection, the Committee considered the bill. There being no amendments, a voice vote was conducted and the bill was reported favorably from Committee.

At the conclusion of consideration of the bill, Chairman Thompson advised Members that pursuant to the Rules of the House, Members had until Monday, May 15, 2023 to file any supplemental, dissenting, or minority views with the Committee. Without objection, staff was given permission to make any necessary technical, clarifying, or conforming changes to reflect the intent of the Committee.

COMMITTEE VOTES

In compliance with clause 3 (b) of rule XIII of the House of Representatives, H.R. 662 was reported by voice vote with a majority quorum present. There was no request for a recorded vote.

COMMITTEE OVERSIGHT FINDINGS

Pursuant to clause 3(c)(1) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee on Agriculture's oversight findings and recommendations are reflected in the body of this report.

EARMARK STATEMENT

H.R. 662 does not contain any congressional earmarks, limited tax benefits, or limited tariff benefits as defined in clause 9(e), 9(f), or 9(g) of rule XXI of the Rules of the House Representatives.

PERFORMANCE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Pursuant to clause 3(c)(4) of rule XIII, the objective of H.R. 662 is to improve access for producers to disaster funding by making block grants to States to deliver the disaster relief.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE STATEMENT

No advisory committees within the meaning of section 5(b) of the Federal Advisory Committee Act were created by this legislation.

APPLICABILITY TO THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

The Committee finds that the legislation does not relate to the terms and conditions of employment or access to public services or accommodations within the meaning of section 102(b)(3) of the Congressional Accountability Act (Public Law 104-1).

FEDERAL MANDATES STATEMENT

The Committee adopted as its own the estimate of Federal mandates prepared by the Director of the Congressional Budget Office pursuant to section 423 of the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act (Public Law 104-4).

DUPLICATION OF FEDERAL PROGRAMS

This bill does not establish or reauthorize a program of the Federal Government known to be duplicative of another Federal program, a program that was included in any report from the Government Accountability Office to Congress pursuant to section 21 of Public Law 111-139, or a program related to a program identified in the most recent Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance.

BUDGET ACT COMPLIANCE (SECTIONS 308, 402, AND 423)

The provisions of clause 3(c)(2) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives and section 308(a)(1) of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 (relating to estimates of new budget authority, new spending authority, new credit authority, or increased or decreased revenues or tax expenditures) are not considered applicable. The estimate and comparison required to be prepared by the

Director of the Congressional Budget Office under clause 3(c)(3) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives and sections 402 and 423 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 submitted to the Committee prior to the filing of this report are as follows:

H.R. 662, Block Grant Assistance Act of 2023			
As ordered reported by the House Committee on Agriculture on May 11, 2023			
By Fiscal Year, Millions of Dollars	2023	2023-2028	2023-2033
Direct Spending (Outlays)	0	0	0
Revenues	0	0	0
Increase or Decrease (-) in the Deficit	0	0	0
Spending Subject to Appropriation (Outlays)	0	0	0
Increases <i>net direct spending</i> in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2034?	No	Statutory pay-as-you-go procedures apply? No	
Increases <i>on-budget deficits</i> in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2034?	No	Mandate Effects	
		Contains intergovernmental mandate?	No
		Contains private-sector mandate?	No

H.R. 662 would amend title I of the Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2023 (division N of Public Law 117–328), to authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to use block grants to states and territories under the Emergency Relief Program (ERP) to provide disaster assistance to agricultural producers. Title I of that act provided more than \$3.7 billion to cover agricultural losses caused by natural disasters in calendar year 2022.

CBO is not aware of any laws, regulations, or other directives that prevent the Secretary from using block grants to distribute aid through ERP. Furthermore, based on information from the Department of Agriculture, CBO expects that explicitly allowing the department to use block grants to disburse those funds would not affect the timing of outlays. On that basis, CBO estimates that enacting H.R. 662 would have no effect on the federal budget.

The CBO staff contact for this estimate is Erik J. O'Donoghue. The estimate was reviewed by H. Samuel Papenfuss, Deputy Director of Budget Analysis.

PHILLIP L. SWAGEL,
Director, Congressional Budget Office.

CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW MADE BY THE BILL, AS REPORTED

In compliance with clause 3(e) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, changes in existing law made by the bill, as reported, are shown as follows (new matter is printed in italics and existing law in which no change is proposed is shown in roman):

**DISASTER RELIEF SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS
ACT, 2023**

**DIVISION N—DISASTER RELIEF SUP-
PLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS ACT,
2023**

TITLE I

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

AGRICULTURAL PROGRAMS

PROCESSING, RESEARCH AND MARKETING

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

For an additional amount for “Office of the Secretary”, \$3,741,715,000, to remain available until expended, for necessary expenses related to losses of revenue, quality or production losses of crops (including milk, on-farm stored commodities, crops prevented from planting in 2022, and harvested adulterated wine grapes), trees, bushes, and vines, as a consequence of droughts, wildfires, hurricanes, floods, derechos, excessive heat, tornadoes, winter storms, freeze, including a polar vortex, smoke exposure, and excessive moisture occurring in calendar year 2022 under such terms and conditions as determined by the Secretary: *Provided*, That of the amounts provided under this heading in this Act, the Secretary shall use up to \$494,500,000 to provide assistance to producers of livestock, as determined by the Secretary of Agriculture, for losses incurred during calendar year 2022 due to drought or wildfires: *Provided further*, That the amount provided under this heading in this Act shall be subject to the terms and conditions set forth in the first, second, and fourth through twelfth provisos under this heading in title I of the Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2022 (division B of Public Law 117–43), except that each reference to 2020 or 2021 in such provisos in such Act shall be deemed to be a reference instead to 2022: *Provided further*, That the Secretary of Agriculture may provide assistance for losses described under this heading in this Act in the form of block grants to eligible States and territories.

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