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Farm Bill Vetoed; Override Likely

 By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
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WASHINGTON (AP) -- President Bush vetoed the \$300 billion [farm bill](#) on Wednesday, calling it a tax increase on regular Americans at a time of high [food prices](#) in the face of a near-certain override by Congress.

It was the 10th veto of Bush's presidency. But since it passed both houses of Congress with veto-proof majorities, his action will likely be overridden.

The president calls the legislation fiscally irresponsible and says it gives away too much money to wealthy farmers, yet his criticism didn't faze lawmakers from both parties who voted for increased crop subsidies, food stamps for the poor and other goodies to help their districts in an election year.

"At a time of high food prices and record farm income, this bill lacks program reform and fiscal discipline," Bush said in his veto statement to Congress. "It continues subsidies for the wealthy and increases farm bill spending by more than \$20 billion, while using budget gimmicks to hide much of the increase."

Bush also said the bill was inconsistent with his administration's objectives in international trade negotiations, particularly when it comes to opening markets to U.S. farmers and ranchers, and that it needlessly expands the size of government.

"At a time when net farm income is projected to increase by more than \$28 billion in one year, the American taxpayer should not be forced to subsidize that group of farmers who have adjusted gross incomes of up to \$1.5 million," Bush said. "When commodity prices are at record highs, it is irresponsible to increase government subsidy rates for 15 crops, subsidize additional crops, and provide payments that further distort markets."

The bill's supporters reacted swiftly -- and confidently -- to the veto.

"Back home in Montana, we say you shouldn't bring a knife to a gun fight," said Sen. [Max Baucus](#), D-Mont. "We've got the votes to override the president and make the farm bill law, and that's what this Congress will do."

White House spokeswoman [Dana Perino](#) said lawmakers should think twice before they override Bush's veto.

"Members are going to have to think about how they will explain these votes back in their districts at a time when prices are on the rise," she said. "People are not going to want to see their taxes increase."

White House budget director [Jim Nussle](#) said Bush rejected it because it increases federal spending. He said Americans are frustrated with wasteful government spending and the funneling of taxpayer funds to pet projects. "This only worsens the frustration that they will feel," Nussle said, adding that Congress should extend the current farm bill.

About two-thirds of the bill would pay for nutrition programs such as food stamps and emergency [food aid](#) for the needy. An additional \$40 billion is for farm subsidies while almost \$30 billion would go to farmers to idle their land and to other environmental

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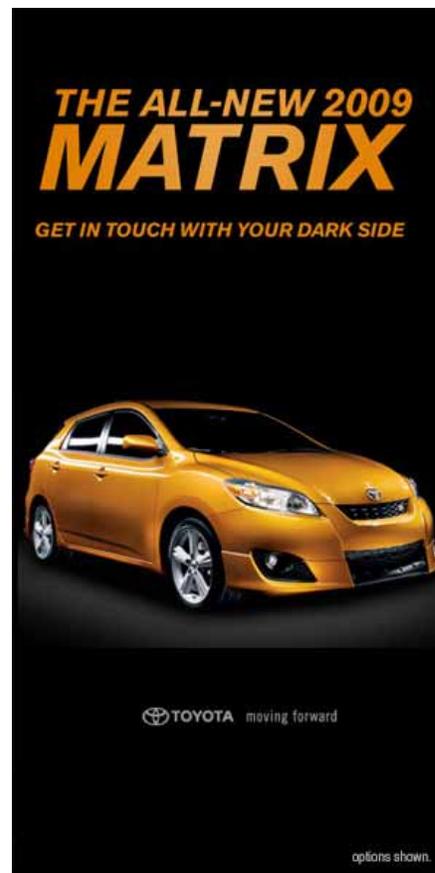
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programs.

House Speaker [Nancy Pelosi](#), D-Calif., has said that the measure will drastically increase nutrition initiatives that will help 38 million U.S. families put food on their tables. She made it clear she would have preferred smaller farm subsidies, but deferred to some Democratic colleagues looking ahead to the fall campaign.

Some Republicans criticized the mostly bipartisan and popular bill because a few home-state pet causes, including tax breaks for Kentucky racehorse owners and additional aid for salmon fishermen in the Pacific Northwest.

The bill also would:

--Boost nutrition programs, including food stamps and emergency domestic food aid, by more than \$10 billion over 10 years. It would expand a program to provide fresh fruits and vegetables to schoolchildren.

--Increase subsidies for certain crops, including fruits and vegetables excluded from previous farm bills.

--Extend dairy programs.

--Increase loan rates for sugar producers.

--Urge the government to buy surplus sugar and sell it to ethanol producers for use in a mixture with corn.

--Cut a per-gallon ethanol tax credit for refiners from 51 cents to 45 cents. The credit supports the blending of fuel with the corn-based additive. More money would go to cellulosic ethanol, made from plant matter.

--Require that meats and other fresh foods carry labels with their country of origin.

--Stop allowing farmers to collect subsidies for multiple farm businesses.

--Reopen a major discrimination case against the Agriculture Department. Thousands of black farmers who missed a deadline would get a chance to file claims alleging they were denied loans or other subsidies.

--Pay farmers for weather-related farm losses from a new \$3.8 billion disaster relief fund.

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