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THE FARM BILL
ANOTHER SLUSH FUND,
FULL OF EMPTY PROMISES

The farm bill heading for full committee markup contains roughly \$13 billion of promised spending increases, with no way to pay for them. Under "contingency" language repeated several times throughout the bill, the spending hikes would take effect only if offsets are identified. But the bill contains no offsets for these contingent increases, meaning they will have to be paid for "later" - unless Democrats choose to violate their own celebrated pay-as-you-go [PAYGO] rule.

- The Bill Contains About \$13 Billion in Unsupported Promises. As noted, the subcommittee-reported bill calls for an estimated \$13 billion in spending increases over 5 years, distributed roughly as follows: \$4 billion in conservation; \$6 billion in nutrition programs, including expanded eligibility for food stamps; and \$3 billion for energy and other programs. But the "contingency" language in these provisions allows the increases only if they are offset - and because no offsets for these items are included, these are unsupported promises.
It Offers No Significant Reform. The overall thrust of the bill is to push for higher spending, with no significant reforms to make farm programs better, more efficient, or more effective. It does contain some savings - but they are plowed back into other spending.
It is an Invitation to Violate PAYGO. Because the committee has so far failed to provide offsets for the additional \$13 billion, offsets will have to be introduced later - possibly on the House floor - unless Democrats choose to violate their own PAYGO rule. The options are the following:
- Admit that the increases are empty promises.
- Violate PAYGO - and considering how Democrats recently tried to dodge their own earmark rules, this would not be surprising.
- Raise taxes.
- Raid other committees' jurisdictions to find offsetting cuts.
- Cut other programs in the bill, most likely those in the commodity title.

One way or another, these "contingent" spending increases amount to a slush fund that will lead to broken promises.