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By: Colby Khoshreza, Staff Member

President Barack Obama's recent budget proposal to Congress includes a variety of cuts to

federal programs including substantial reductions to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The reductions include a \$3 billion decrease in the USDA budget in fiscal year 2012, thus bringing total spending to approximately \$145 billion.[1]

(http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ftn1) The changes are likely to have a significant impact on farmers and consumers as the proposed budget calls for ending direct payments to major growers regardless of commodity prices, eliminates bacteria testing of produce and decreases funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).[2] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ftn2)

Under the proposed budget, farmer aid would briefly rise before facing a long-term reduction as a result of Washington budget woes and increased farm profits.[3]

(http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ftn3) The cuts would end direct payments paid to growers of major crops regardless of commodity prices saving \$22.7 billion through 2022.[4] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ftn4)

While these cuts could have long-term impact on the survival of farms, especially small and family-owned farms, the cuts are offset by record farms profits in 2011, thus lowering the need for crop subsidies.[5]

(http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ftn5)

Consumers could be impacted by the proposed budget's decision to eliminate the agency's only program that regularly tests fruits and vegetables for deadly pathogens.[6]

(http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ftn6) According to the White House, the decision to eliminate the \$5 million per year program was made after "the USDA determined it had a limited impact." [7] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ftn7) As a result, consumers may be left without adequate protection as public health officials will have fewer tools to investigate deadly food borne illness outbreaks. While the USDA has argued that state and local officials are better equipped to perform this function, lack of funding at the local level continues to be a problem in maintaining food safety programs.[8] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ftn8)

Another major program that will face small decreases as a result of the proposed budget is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.[9] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ftn9) The SNAP budget, typically recognized as the food stamp program, would decrease by nearly 1% in 2013, a reduction that occurs at a time when one out of six people are receiving assistance.[10] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ftn10) SNAP is the USDA's largest budgetary item and compromises \$87.5 billion per year of the agency's budget. While the decrease comes at a time when a large number of Americans depend on the assistance, the USDA predicts that as the economy continues to improve fewer individuals will rely on the program.[11] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ftn11)

Washington budget cuts appear to result in a large impact on the overall operation of the United States Department of Agriculture. From food stamps to food inspection and farmer aid, the agency's various programs all seem to be evolving and decreasing in funding and impact. While local and state government is often expected to fill the voids left by USDA cuts, this often does not occur as municipal governments are facing budget woes of their own. The next couple of years will be crucial in examining the impact, if any, that these financial changes will have on food safety and farm stability.

- [1] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ftnref) Daniel Looker, *Obama's USDA Budget to Shrink \$3 billion in 2012*, (Feb. 14, 2012), http://www.agriculture.com/news/policy/obamas-usda-budget-to-shrink-3-billion_4-ar14688 (http://www.agriculture.com/news/policy/obamas-usda-budget-to-shrink-3-billion_4-ar14688).
- [2] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ftnref) Alan Bjerga, *USDA Budget Would Rise 2.5% Before Subsidy Cuts Would Begin*, BUSINESS WEEK (Feb. 16, 2012), <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2012-02-16/usda-budget-would-rise-2-5-before-subsidy-cuts-begin.html> (<http://www.businessweek.com/news/2012-02-16/usda-budget-would-rise-2-5-before-subsidy-cuts-begin.html>).
- [3] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ftnref) *Id.*
- [4] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ftnref) *Id.*
- [5] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ftnref) *Id.*
- [6] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ftnref) *Budget cuts could eliminate bacterial testing of produce*, CHRON ONLINE (Feb. 16, 2012), <http://www.chron.com/news/nation-world/article/Budget-cuts-could-eliminate-bacteria-testing-of-3337342.php> (<http://www.chron.com/news/nation-world/article/Budget-cuts-could-eliminate-bacteria-testing-of-3337342.php>).
- [7] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ftnref) *Id.*
- [8] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ftnref) *Id.*
- [9] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ftnref) Alan Bjerga, *USDA Budget Would Rise 2.5% Before Subsidy Cuts Would Begin*, BUSINESS WEEK (Feb. 16, 2012), <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2012-02-16/usda-budget-would-rise-2-5-before-subsidy-cuts-begin.html> (<http://www.businessweek.com/news/2012-02-16/usda-budget-would-rise-2-5-before-subsidy-cuts-begin.html>).
- [10] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ftnref) *Id.*
- [11] (http://www.blogger.com/blogger.g?blogID=8202935745006855383#_ftnref) *Id.*

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