

Agents 'cautiously optimistic' that federal crop insurance program will not be slashed

| Nov 05, 2015

<http://www.ibamag.com/news/midwest-news/agents-cautiously-optimistic-that-federal-crop-insurance-program-will-not-be-slashed-26383.aspx>

By Josh Chetwynd

Midwest farm-state agents are beginning to breathe a sigh of relief as lawmakers have been assured that proposed slashes to the federal crop insurance program passed under a new federal budget bill will be reversed.

Steve Becher, executive director of the Professional Insurance Agents of North Dakota, said he was "cautiously optimistic" that the \$3 billion in cuts to crop insurance spending over the next 10 years will be restored as part of an omnibus spending bill that must be passed in December.

His optimism is based on statements from farm-friendly members of Congress who have fought for protecting funding to the program.

"Leadership has heeded our concerns by agreeing to completely reverse this disastrous provision in the upcoming omnibus," said, Rep. K. Michael Conaway, a Texas congressman who is the chairman of the House Agriculture Committee. "I take our leadership at their word when they committed to me and many of my colleagues that we will eliminate these harmful provisions in the not-so-distant future."

Anything short of that, Becher said, would be catastrophic.

"If it goes through as is, it could potentially end crop insurance," he said. "In North Dakota, 70% to 80% of our agents has crop as one of their biggest lines. It would devastate agents in our state."

Agent representatives in North Dakota were not alone in battling against these cuts. Last week, for example, the Kansas Association of Independent Agents (KAIA) sent out an e-mail blast, imploring its membership to call Kansas's US Senators and

members of Congress to vote no on the bill.

In sample talking points, the organizations urged agents to say, "Rural America has already shouldered significant economic cuts. This proposal would cut \$3 billion from the nation's crop insurance delivery system, which is a vital part of business for Kansas farmers and ranchers."

Despite the bill's passage, KAIA's executive director Kerri Spielman also spoke positively about what the final outcome will be on this issue.

"We're hopeful that all the phone calls will continue to help steer the budget conversation in the right direction – so that Kansas farmers and the agents they partner with are not impacted," she said.