



Taking Stock: Policy Design Lab After One Year of Development

Jonathan Coppess

Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics
University of Illinois

December 21, 2023

farmdoc daily (13): 232

Gardner Policy Series

Recommended citation format: Coppess, J. "Taking Stock: Policy Design Lab After One Year of Development." *farmdoc daily* (13): 232, Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, December 21, 2023.

Permalink: <https://farmdocdaily.illinois.edu/2023/12/taking-stock-policy-design-lab-after-one-year-of-development.html>

'Tis the time of year for review and to take stock, add a little reflection. For the policy arena, 2023 was a particularly dysfunctional, exhausting, and frustrating year with little to show for it all (see e.g., Karni, [December 19, 2023](#)). From troubles in the Speaker's chair to the debt ceiling and basic struggles to fund the federal government, our system of self-government has accomplished too little of it. Among the missed opportunities amidst the chaos was reauthorization of a farm bill in the 90th year of its operation; with an extension granted, however, another opportunity presents itself in the New Year, but the path is steep and full of obstacles. There is little value and less satisfaction in dwelling on such matters at the end of the year. From a different perspective, it has been nearly one year of development for the Policy Design Lab. As such, this article closes out this particularly difficult year with a review and an appreciation; rather than focus on what wasn't accomplished, herein is a taking of stock for what was.

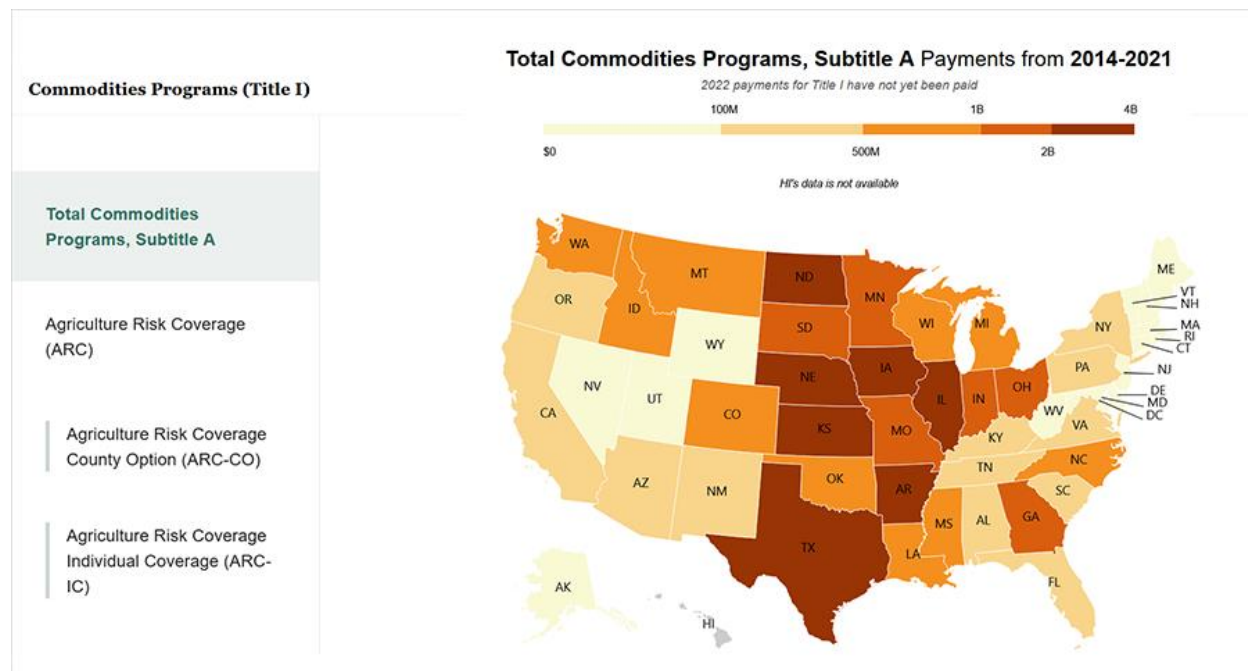
Background on the Policy Design Lab

Development of a Policy Design Lab at the University of Illinois began nearly a year ago as a collaborative project by the Gardner Agriculture Policy Program in conjunction with the National Center for Supercomputing Applications (NCSA), the Institute for Sustainability, Energy, and Environment (iSEE), the Institute for Government and Public Affairs (IGPA), and the College of Agricultural, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences (ACES). Conceptually, the Policy Design Lab is a web-based resource in which to explore and analyze existing policies and, eventually, policy alternatives. The effort works from statutory and legislative text to incorporate and apply research, publicly available data, and computational resources for analysis and visualization efforts. The research and data guided by statutory provisions or legislative options to produce comparative analysis. One goal of the project is to advance understanding about existing policy outcomes, as well as research-backed potential outcomes of alternative designs. Eventually, it will also seek to improve understanding of the policymaking process and facilitate open discussions about policy options. While there is much work yet to do, the project has made significant progress over the last twelve months and users can access a significant amount of data on many of the existing Farm Bill mandatory authorizations and benefits (<https://policydesignlab.ncsa.illinois.edu/>).

We request all readers, electronic media and others follow our citation guidelines when re-posting articles from farmdoc daily. Guidelines are available [here](#). The farmdoc daily website falls under University of Illinois copyright and intellectual property rights. For a detailed statement, please see the University of Illinois Copyright Information and Policies [here](#).

Development Discussion

Development efforts began with the major mandatory farm bill programs to establish the status quo, visualized through maps and other interactive graphics of the distribution of benefits and payments by State. Specifically, the Policy Design Lab has provided interactive data visualizations and maps for the conservation programs in Title II (*farmdoc daily*, [April 13, 2023](#); [May 11, 2023](#); [September 21, 2023](#); [October 19, 2023](#)), the crop insurance program (*farmdoc daily*, [September 7, 2023](#)), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (*farmdoc daily*, [June 8, 2023](#)), and most of the commodities payment programs in Title I of the Farm Bill beginning with the Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) and Price Loss Coverage (PLC) programs (*farmdoc daily*, [August 24, 2023](#)). A recent update to the website added data for the Dairy Margin Coverage program and for the Supplemental Agricultural Disaster Assistance programs (<https://policydesignlab.ncsa.illinois.edu/title1>) in subtitles D and E, respectively, of Title I.



With these last two programs, the first stage of development is effectively completed. A comprehensive view of the status quo based on the 2018 Farm Bill is now available. Early in the New Year, work will focus on updating the data as well as complete various development efforts to improve the website.

To borrow an overused metaphor, development in the past year has prepared the field for the work ahead which will focus on presenting alternative policy designs and innovative, creative policy ideas that are backed by research, data, and analysis. This stage of the work will begin by showcasing a few proof-of-concepts built for specific policy design alternatives. To demonstrate the larger concept and goals, some specific revisions to the ARC program will be presented. That will be followed by the development of further changes to ARC and PLC program designs. Additional designs and analysis will be released on the website as they become available.

Thank You to the Team

A project of this scope and ambition brings many talented, dedicated, and hard-working people into its collaborative orbit. Stepping back from the day-to-day efforts and tasks provides bigger picture reminders. One of them is the ability to grasp a more complete view of how much has been accomplished. More importantly, such perspectives offer many reasons for appreciation to those who have put in the work.

The biggest “thank you” goes to the development and design team at NCSA, without whom very little would have been accomplished. Chris Navarro has provided outstanding leadership, management, and guidance, along with Jong Lee. Chris and Jong have been outstanding partners across multiple projects. I

appreciate not only their expertise and talents, but also their willingness and interest in applying them to matters of farm policy.

The lead developer and programmer for the user interface part of the website is Pengyin Shan. She has done an outstanding job transforming ideas and data into an informative and usable website. Development benefited exponentially from Pengyin's addition to the team about midway through the year. She has also been expertly assisted by Yong Wook Kim who has also helped develop and maintain the Gardner ARC/PLC calculator (<https://fd-tools.ncsa.illinois.edu/arcplc>).

Sandeep Puthanveetil Satheesan has provided leadership and great skill on the backend database portion of the project. Previously, he helped lead similar efforts for the Gardner ARC/PLC calculator as well as the Cover Crop Analyzer tool development (<https://covercrop.ncsa.illinois.edu/>). From the Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics (ACE) and the *farmdoc* team, Ryan Batts has taken the lead role in managing the data efforts. Between Ryan and Sandeep, a mountain of often confusing or difficult data has been cleaned, organized, and presented in a usable manner. Along the way, a team of researchers at IGPA, along with graduate students and researchers in ACE and NCSA, have helped the data efforts substantially and their contributions are greatly appreciated.

The website design efforts have been the expert work of Lijiang Fu, with valuable assistance and leadership from Lisa Gatske. They have consistently turned somewhat vague and occasionally confusing ideas and concepts into excellent designs and visuals. Their work has guided the developers and programmers, as well as the entire team, through multiple iterations, revisions, and stages of work. In addition, Lisa Yanello has provided valuable (and patient) project management for the team.

The view from the perspective offered by the end of a busy, productive year is one of appreciation for the scope of progress and accomplishment. Building something like the Policy Design Lab over the course of a year is a painstaking process of concepts, designs, data, and development for multiple programs that pull from multiple sources. It is a jumbled mess until worked over by the collective effort of an expert, talented team. And that perspective, in turn, generates further appreciation for the opportunities to be a part of challenging, interesting, and valuable projects; reminders abound to appreciate the good fortune to be a part of great teams.

In closing out 2023, I want to thank those great teams of which I have the good fortune to be a part and to the many talented collaborators on the *farmdoc* team, the Gardner Agriculture Policy Program, NCSA, the Department of ACE, and across the College of Agricultural, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences (ACES) at the University of Illinois. Thank you all. I look forward to a productive year ahead.

References

Coppess, J. and A. Knepp. "A View of the Farm Bill Through Policy Design, Part 1: EQIP." *farmdoc daily* (13):69, Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, April 13, 2023.

Coppess, J. and A. Knepp. "A View of the Farm Bill Through Policy Design, Part 2: CSP." *farmdoc daily* (13):86, Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, May 11, 2023.

Coppess, J. "A View of the Farm Bill Through Policy Design, Part 3: SNAP." *farmdoc daily* (13):105, Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, June 8, 2023.

Coppess, J. "A View of the Farm Bill Through Policy Design, Part 4: ARC and PLC." *farmdoc daily* (13):156, Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, August 24, 2023.

Coppess, J. "A View of the Farm Bill Through Policy Design, Part 5: Crop Insurance." *farmdoc daily* (13):162, Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, September 7, 2023.

Coppess, J. "A View of the Farm Bill Through Policy Design, Part 6: Conservation Reserve Program." *farmdoc daily* (13):172, Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, September 21, 2023.

Coppess, J. "A View of the Farm Bill Through Policy Design, Part 7: ACEP and RCPP." *farmdoc daily* (13):192, Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, October 19, 2023.

Karni, Annie. "House Dysfunction by the Numbers: 724 Votes, only 27 Laws Enacted." *The New York Times*. December 19, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/19/us/politics/house-republicans-laws-year.html>.