

House passes farm bill; strips out food-stamp program

Christopher Doering, Gannett Washington Bureau 5:35 p.m. EDT July 11, 2013

House lawmakers narrowly passed a new version of the farm bill that doesn't include money for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program relied on by millions of Americans.



(Photo: Susan Montoya Bryan, AP)

WASHINGTON -- House lawmakers approved a scaled-back version of the farm bill Thursday after stripping out the popular food-stamp program used by 48 million Americans.

The bill narrowly passed on a 216-208 vote, largely along party lines. A dozen Republicans voted against the measure while no Democrats voted in favor.

The measure focuses solely on farm programs and would delay, at least for now, efforts to overhaul the country's food-stamp program that traditionally has made up 80% of spending in the bill.

STORY: [White House pledges veto of GOP farm bill \(http://www.usatoday.com/story/theoval/2013/07/11/obama-white-house-republicans-farm-bill-food-stamps/2508195/\)](http://www.usatoday.com/story/theoval/2013/07/11/obama-white-house-republicans-farm-bill-food-stamps/2508195/)

STORY: [U.S. House rejects \\$500 billion farm bill \(http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2013/06/20/farm-bill-fails/2442339/\)](http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2013/06/20/farm-bill-fails/2442339/)

"This process hasn't been easy and we still have a long way to go to get a farm bill signed into law," said Rep. Kristi Noem, R-S.D. "Splitting the farm bill is not ideal and certainly wasn't the path I would have chosen, but at the end of the day, we need to get a farm bill into conference with the Senate."

Noem told reporters that House leaders said they expect to vote on the food-stamp portion of the bill "in the next week or two."

House lawmakers last month failed to pass a five-year, \$500 billion farm bill that would have implemented the biggest cuts to the food-stamp program, now known as the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap\)](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap), in decades.

The legislation stalled after Republican lawmakers pushed for deeper cuts in SNAP spending, drawing the ire of Democrats who feared too many poor people would no longer be eligible.

The divide siphoned off votes and left GOP leaders scrambling to find an alternative path forward. The current farm law expires on Sept. 30.

Democrats lined up Thursday to oppose splitting the bill. They criticized Republican leaders for not giving them enough time to review the measure and expressed fears that removing SNAP spending would hurt American families that depend on the program.

The White House late Wednesday said it would veto the 608-page farm bill because it omitted SNAP spending and did not "contain sufficient commodity and crop insurance reforms."

Democratic Rep. Dave Loebsack of Iowa called the House actions "unconscionable," saying the "legislation does not move the bill forward, it is in fact a step back."

Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., head of the Senate Agriculture Committee, described it as "an insult to rural America."

For Republicans, House passage means leaders in both the House and Senate are a step closer toward drafting a final farm bill. The Senate passed its farm bill in June.

House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, said splitting the bill was "unusual" and not his preferred path forward, but "my goal is to get a farm bill passed."

Farm groups have been divided over whether to break up the legislation.

Last week, more than 530 agriculture and other rural groups signed a letter opposing the plan. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said in an interview that the House bill lacked comprehensive reform and criticized Republicans for turning their backs on rural Americans in favor of partisan politics.

"I'm sure there is a lot of disappointment and irritation," said Vilsack. "Farmers, ranchers, producers and rural Americans really deserved much better than they got today."

Some farm organizations recently have reversed course and came out in support of removing SNAP spending from the bill. [National Corn Growers](#)

Association (<http://www.ncga.com/home>) President Pam Johnson said Thursday the group had opposed splitting farm and nutrition programs but now sees "no other way" to move the farm bill to conference with the Senate.

"Our action in no way reflects our approval of its contents or the manner in which it came to the floor," said Johnson. "Unless significant change is made to the bill in the conference committee, we will strongly urge its rejection by the Senate and the House."

The farm bill passed Thursday would save about \$20 billion by ending or consolidating several programs and reducing subsidy spending, including the \$5 billion a year in direct payments given to farmers regardless of need. The savings would be used to expand the taxpayer-subsidized crop insurance program.

The House proposal also would remove the so-called "permanent law" that causes farm programs to go back to 1949 levels if a bill is not in place, curbing plantings and forcing the government to increase subsidy payments by tens of billions of dollars.

Lawmakers and agriculture groups have cautioned that without the backstop, Congress would lack the motivation to pass a farm bill on time.

Bob Stallman, president of the American Farm Bureau Federation (<http://www.fb.org/>), the country's largest farm group, said he had opposed repealing the 1949 law and splitting farm programs from SNAP spending, but his organization remains committed to working with Republicans and Democrats in both chambers "to deliver a farm bill to the president's desk for his signature by September."