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Boozman: Farm bill clock is running out, committee action needed

08/04/26 3:53 PM

By [Kim Chipman \(/authors/792-kim-chipman\)](#) and [Grace Miller \(/authors/880-grace-miller\)](#)

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Sen. John Boozman, R- Ark., speaks during the 2023 National Association of Farm Broadcasters Washington Watch event. (Agri-Pulse photo)

It's now or never for the 2026 farm bill.

That's the urgent warning from Senate Agriculture Chairman John Boozman, R-Ark., as his committee prepares to take up a farm bill (<https://www.agri-pulse.com/articles/25071-snap-cost-delay-of-one-year-and-e15-are-added-to-senate-farm-bill>) on Thursday. The proposed legislation addresses key ag items not updated since Congress last passed a full, five-year farm bill in 2018. This includes modernizing loans for farmers.

"Everything now is so much more expensive. We have to increase the amount of loan limits, so they'll be able to get the financing they need to go forward," Boozman told reporters on Capitol Hill on Tuesday.

The panel's farm bill text also includes a provision to allow year-round, voluntary sales of higher ethanol-fuel blends (<https://www.agri-pulse.com/articles/25075-api-rejects-e15-in-senate-farm-bill-as-farm-bureau-urges-passage>), known as E15, and a one-year delay for certain states facing costs related to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits. A postponement of the cost-sharing requirement has been a top issue for Democrats.

It remains to be seen if a compromise deal on SNAP, as well as inclusion of E15 and other issues, can draw enough support to advance a farm bill out of the committee this week. The absence of panel member Sen. Mitch McConnell, the Kentucky Republican who hasn't been working due to health issues, means at least one Democrat needs to vote with all Republican members.

Boozman is hopeful for robust bipartisan backing of the legislation. The bill then would be teed up for pre-conference discussions between the Senate and House, which passed its own version of a farm bill in late April. Without Senate Ag Committee approval this week, it will be tough to get the legislation through Congress this year, Boozman told

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“The idea of coming back [from recess], getting it out of committee then, conferencing it with the House, and then getting it voted on in the House and Senate ... I think that it will be very, very difficult,” Boozman said, adding that American farmers have been waiting a long time and deserve a farm bill.

The Senate is set to start a five-week recess next week and return in mid-September. Both the Senate and House are set to be in session at the same time just for a few weeks before another break for almost all of October and the first week of November. The lengthy recess is to give lawmakers up for reelection time to campaign in their districts and states ahead of the Nov. 3 midterms.

After the elections, getting a farm bill passed before a new Congress begins in January, with a potential change in the balance of political power, is broadly seen as unlikely.

Boozman is urging colleagues to “step up and provide the votes” to advance the bill to the Senate floor, the Ag Committee said on Tuesday.

Boozman also said it's too soon to know the scope of amendments that Republicans and Democrats may offer up in Thursday's markup of the farm bill.

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On the proposed delay of SNAP costs faced by some states, Boozman said committee members are looking to see if the provision “needs to be adjusted.” He also said states soon will get help in figuring out how to effectively get their SNAP payment error rate down. He declined to elaborate.

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On E15, both the American Petroleum Institute and Fueling American Jobs Coalition, which includes union workers and independent American oil refiners, have come out against the recently added ethanol provision to the Senate farm bill draft.

“At a time when Americans continue to face high energy costs, Congress should not use a must-pass Farm Bill to advance a proposal that will raise gas prices by expanding year-round E15 without meaningful Renewable Fuel Standard reform,” Fueling American Jobs Coalition said in a statement on Tuesday. “This proposal opens the door to even higher ethanol mandates without addressing the excessive and volatile RFS compliance costs already burdening consumers and independent refiners alike.”

Year-round, voluntary E15 is a top priority of ethanol and corn producers. Ag and biofuel groups, including the American Farm Bureau Federation, are calling on Congress to pass E15 as proposed in the Senate farm bill.

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Kim Chipman
Congressional
Editor