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The farm bill's sticking points in the Senate

Senate Agriculture Chair John Boozman's office says he won't let the perfect be the enemy of the good, but the 'skinny' bill may still be a heavy lift.

The House somewhat surprisingly passed the farm bill last week, but its path in the Senate is still fraught with conflict, including competition from other measures that senators may consider more important.

Until hours before the House began debate on the bill about 10:30 p.m. on Wednesday evening, it was unclear whether Republican disagreements over legislation on surveillance and Homeland Security Department funding would stall it. But leadership resolved those measures, kicking off a farm-bill debate that lasted until 2:30 a.m., with roll-call votes on amendments and final passage on Thursday.

The vote on final passage was respectable — 224 in favor to 200 against, with 14 Democrats joining all but three Republicans to pass the final bill. The real excitement was the passage of an amendment sponsored by Republican Rep. Anna Paulina Luna to remove a provision providing a liability shield to Bayer, the owner of glyphosate-producing Monsanto, and other chemical companies. The language in question would have prohibited states from mandating labeling on chemicals beyond what is required by the Environmental Protection Agency. The Luna amendment passed 280 to 142, with 73 Republicans joining 207 Democrats in voting for it.

Congress already provided \$66 billion in increased spending on commodity subsidies, crop insurance, and other programs in last year's One Big Beautiful Bill Act. This farm bill — called "skinny" by House Agriculture Committee Chairman Glenn Thompson — is a dull reauthorization of other programs, but farm groups do consider it important. The bill reauthorizes the Conservation Reserve Program, which pays farmers to idle farmland for conservation and wildlife purposes; reauthorizes the Grain Standards Act, which establishes official quality standards for grains and oilseeds and their inspection; and transfers the Food for Peace program from the State Department to the Agriculture Department.

The House bill would also nullify California's Proposition 12, which requires that pork sold in the state come from animals raised under certain conditions. Thompson has said he will fight for that provision in a conference with the Senate, but that provision and any attempt to include the liability shield for chemical producers would make Senate passage more difficult.

A spokesperson for Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman John Boozman told *National Journal* in an email, "The chairman supports proposals to reaffirm the EPA's role in

labeling crop protection products and undoing California's Proposition 12. However, he has been clear that controversial provisions, even those he supports, will not be included if they lack bipartisan backing in the Senate. The goal is to pass Farm Bill 2.0, and that requires 60 votes."

The OBBBA also cut the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program by \$187 billion over 10 years to provide funding for the farm-subsidy increases and for budget savings. Anti-hunger advocates want that cut reversed.

After the House vote, Senate Agriculture Committee Democrats led by ranking member Amy Klobuchar issued a joint statement in which they said: "With a five-year high in small farm bankruptcies, the farm bill must address rising input costs, provide new opportunities for domestic markets, and fight for a trade agenda that works for everyone." But the only specific policy shift they cited was "ensuring all states are treated equally by delaying the new SNAP cost shifts." The OBBBA places a greater cost-sharing burden on states with SNAP payment error rates above 6%, but to get the votes to pass the bill, the highest error rates were allowed a delay, which the Democrats consider unfair.

Boozman and Thompson both say they are opposed to any changes to the SNAP provision, but if the Democrats' only demand for a SNAP fix is allowing all states to delay, that may be a small hurdle to get the bill passed. The bigger barriers may be demands by some senators to allow the sale of E15 gasoline year-round and nationwide, and a \$15 billion immediate farm-aid package.

E15 wasn't included in the House farm bill because small and medium-sized refiners object to it. House leadership supposedly made a promise to hold a vote on E15 the week of May 12. No agreement to satisfy the refiners has been reached, but E15 might have a better chance as standalone legislation, especially if the Senate doesn't get to the farm bill.

Boozman and Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman John Hoeven hope to add the immediate farm aid to a war supplemental bill if the Trump administration asks for one.

Scheduling a farm bill and a conference with the House on top of E15 and a supplemental will be a challenge for the Senate in an election year — especially since Boozman has not released farm-bill text or scheduled a markup.