

[By Mike Lillis](#)

More than three dozen House Republicans — including a member of the GOP leadership — have joined Democrats to press Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) to bring the farm bill to the floor this month.

Behind Reps. Kristi Noem (R-S.D.) and Peter Welch (D-Vt.), the bipartisan group of lawmakers says reauthorizing the bill, which expires Sept. 30, is necessary to ensure the nation's farmers "can continue to provide an abundant, affordable and safe food supply."

They're also emphasizing the importance of food stamps in the down economy and arguing the bill's farm subsidies will stimulate the economy.

"Agriculture supports nearly 16 million jobs nationwide and over 45 million people are helped each year by the nutrition programs in the farm bill," the lawmakers wrote to Boehner, House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-Va.), House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer (Md.).

"We have a tremendous opportunity to set the course of farm and nutrition policy for another five years while continuing to maintain and support these jobs nationwide."

The letter was signed by 24 Democrats and 38 Republicans, including Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-Wash.), who is a member of GOP leadership as vice chairwoman of the House Republican Conference. McMorris Rodgers was recently named presumptive GOP presidential nominee Mitt Romney's liaison to the House.

Of the 38 Republicans on the letter, 16 are freshman members who were elected in the wave election of 2010. Their support is notable because opposition from that bloc of lawmakers has often made GOP leaders reluctant to bring legislation to the floor.

In a rare show of bipartisanship, the Senate last month approved its version of the farm bill, and the House Agriculture Committee passed a separate proposal with a strong 35-11 vote last week.

But, in a scenario reminiscent of the transportation bill debate, House GOP leaders are wary of bringing the bill to the floor for fear that more conservative members will revolt over the spending levels.

A wild card in the debate is Boehner's historic distaste for farm subsidies. The Ohio Republican voted against the 2002 and 2008 farm bills, saying the subsidies distort free markets.

Boehner's office deflected questions about the farm bill on Thursday, noting that Cantor's office sets the House schedule.

"We appreciate the hard work of the chairman and the Ag Committee and will be discussing the committee's product with our members in the weeks ahead," Cantor's office told The Hill.

Meanwhile, rural House members are warning that time is of the essence.

"The message from our constituents and rural America is clear: we need a farm bill now," the lawmakers wrote. "We ask that you make this legislation a priority of the House as it is critically important to rural and urban Americans alike."