

[By Daniel Newhauser](#)

Members are renewing a push for House consideration of the chamber's stalled farm bill, tying the legislation to a record drought devastating much of the country.

The efforts, however, are unlikely to sway Republican leaders, who still see the bill as far too contentious to bring to the floor so close to the November elections.

"No decisions have been made on the farm bill yet," Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) told reporters Thursday. That comes despite lobbying by two members of his leadership team to bring the measure to a vote and conference it with a Senate-passed bill before current legislation expires Sept. 30.

Rep. Kristi Noem, a freshman member of leadership, and Conference Vice Chairwoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers (Wash.) — both of whom represent agriculture-heavy districts — signed on to a letter Thursday asking Boehner and Majority Leader Eric Cantor (Va.) to bring the bill to the floor before August.

Noem, a member of the Agriculture Committee, led the bipartisan effort, which drew 62 signatures. The South Dakota Republican said in an interview that she met recently with Boehner and on Tuesday evening with Cantor, but "they said they're concerned the bill wouldn't pass."

"They obviously don't want to send the farm bill to the floor to have it fail," she said, noting the roughly \$16 billion in cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program are too deep for many Democrats but not enough for some Republicans.

That was the point of the letter, said Rep. Peter Welch (Vt.), who led Democrats in the effort.

"We've got to encourage the leadership that rank-and-file Members support giving America a farm bill," he said.

Noem said she is also making the case based on the recent drought, the most expansive in about 50 years. Livestock disaster programs included in the 2008 farm bill have expired, she said, and passing a new bill would help ranchers in case of a catastrophe.

Notably, Boehner mentioned the farm bill when asked about the drought.

"Most farmers in my district ... avail themselves of crop insurance," he said. "That's why it's in the farm bill, that's why our government subsidizes the cost of crop insurance, to encourage farmers to buy that. In most cases, it should be sufficient to deal with this drought."

But GOP aides said the most likely scenario remains that an extension of the 2008 farm bill would come to the floor in September.

Noem's message echoes that of prominent Democrats, such as Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and Senate Agriculture Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow.

"This drought underscores the need for risk-management tools, better crop insurance, and it underscores the need for a farm bill," the Michigan Democrat said on the Senate floor Thursday. "We need to get a farm bill done now more than ever."

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi made the same argument in a Thursday letter to several agriculture groups.

"The need for disaster assistance isn't just about farmers and ranchers; it affects consumers, rural communities, and farm equipment manufacturers," the California Democrat wrote.

The same letter underscored why leadership has been reticent to allow the bill on the floor.

"I do not support the cuts to the food and nutrition programs," Pelosi wrote. "But, these differences are all the more reason to bring the bill up for a vote under an open rule that provides all Members with an opportunity to debate the issues [and] offer amendments."

Such an amendment debate could be brutal for Republicans. Rep. Tim Huelskamp, who sits on the Agriculture panel, offered an amendment to cut SNAP further in committee and said he would do so on the floor, too.

He and other conservatives would also consider an amendment to lop the bill in half, splitting the nutrition aid from farm programs.

"I think we need some assurances on the floor that we can get some food stamp reforms," the Kansas Republican said. "There's going to be a fight on that. I'm not afraid to fight."