

[By Erik Wasson](#)

A bipartisan group of rural lawmakers launched an effort Thursday to try to force the House to take up the five-year farm bill that passed out of the House Agriculture Committee.

The group is seeking support for a discharge petition that would put the farm bill on the calendar, whether or not House GOP leaders approve. The effort comes as the heads of the House and Senate Agriculture Committee try to write a compromise farm bill by Sept. 10.

House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) said Thursday that there are not 218 votes in the House for a farm bill given conservative opposition to spending and liberal problems with food stamp cuts.

Reps. Bruce Braley (D-Iowa), Rick Berg (R-N.D.), Chris Gibson (R-N.Y.) and Peter Welch (D-Vt.) are leading the discharge effort. Rep. Kristi Noem (R-S.D.) was originally planning to gather signatures from the GOP side, but decided against joining the effort.

The new effort will be aided by the failure of the House to adjourn for August. Under House rules, pro forma sessions will speed the petition, since it must sit for 30 legislative days after a bill is referred to committee.

Braley filed the discharge petition on July 24, and his office said it will ripen on Sept. 13 if pro-forma days are counted. Once 218 members sign it, the bill will come to the floor. The House will have only eight legislative days in September to act on a farm bill before current programs expire after Sept. 30.

"As you know, the Farm Bill has yet to be brought up and it is unclear whether it will come up prior to the Farm Bill's September 30th expiration date," a new "Dear Colleague" letter states. "The House Agriculture Committee approved the FARM Act by a vote of 35-11 with bipartisan support, but it has yet to be reported. We have heard from various agricultural groups and their

message is loud and clear — they want and need a five-year Farm Bill."

House Agriculture Committee Chairman Frank Lucas (R-Okla.) said that the discharge petition could be one way to move the farm bill forward. He said that during August pro forma sessions he expects to formally report out the farm bill to the floor. That would speed up the ripening of the discharge petition.

Committee ranking member Collin Peterson (D-Minn.) initially said Thursday that he opposed a discharge petition because it could make the process partisan. But once he learned of GOP involvement, he said that the petition could work.

"Maybe that is the way we get it done," he said.

Peterson and Lucas were set to meet with Senate Agriculture Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.) and ranking member Pat Roberts (R-Kan.) late Thursday to chart a path forward for a farm bill.

Peterson was carrying a binder with "options" to negotiate contested items like food stamps. The Senate farm bill cuts less from food stamps than the House bill.

"What I told Debbie is don't get fixated on a number," he said, arguing a compromise bill would have to cut more from food stamps than the \$4 billion in the Senate-passed bill.

Lucas said he will work over recess to build the "coalition of the middle" needed to get the farm bill done.