

Farm bill proposal fails in US Senate ag committee

BY KAMI COONS
KENTUCKY LANTERN

Farm bill progress stalled Thursday as the U.S. Senate Agriculture Committee failed to move forward its version of the omnibus legislation due to a conflict over when states will shoulder a share of federal nutrition assistance costs.

While the bill included bipartisan language from more than 100 bills, Democrats were unwilling to budge on their demand for a two-year extension to the One Big Beautiful Bill Act policy that requires states to pay for part of their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program if they have SNAP payment error rates in excess of 6%.

Chairman John Boozman amended the bill to extend the deadline one year, as a compromise, along with additional funding for an emergency food assistance program.

In his opening remarks, the Republican from Arkansas said the amendments made to the draft are the “best and final offer” to address Democrats’ concerns with SNAP.

“Should this legislation be defeated today, current law will remain in effect, and states who poorly administer SNAP programs will begin to pay for the portion of the benefit cost next year,” Boozman said.

Republicans were without a majority in the room due to the absence of Sen. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, who has been hospitalized and in rehabilitation since June. Sen. Tommy Tuberville, an Alabama Republican, was also not present during the final vote on the bill, allow-

ing Democrats to win the vote against the bill by one vote.

Farm groups expressed disappointment in another delay to the farm bill, which has not been reauthorized since 2018, especially since the Senate version included a provision for year-round, nationwide E15 sought by ethanol and corn producers.

Other groups celebrated that policies like the Save Our Bacon Act, which would block individual state rules on the growing conditions of agricultural products, were not advanced.

Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, said in the seven farm bills that he has worked on, “this is the first one I can recall that we’re not doing on a bipartisan basis.”

Grassley spoke in response to an amendment proposed by Sen. Peter Welch, a Vermont Democrat, to mandate an audit on farming operations that have multiple farm managers or people eligible to receive subsidy payments. He said it was a bill he had worked on with Welch, but since “this has turned out to be a partisan markup, I can’t vote for an amendment that I agree with you on.”

“We can’t have a partisan deal on the floor of the United States Senate, or we don’t get anything done for the family farmers,” Grassley said.

SNAP ERROR RATE EXTENSION
SNAP error rates are calculated with a series of state and federal reviews to measure the accuracy of states in determining who is eligible for SNAP and how much they receive.

Rates for 2025 showed nine states were below the 6% threshold set by the 2025 tax and spending law.

Depending on how high their error rate is, states will be saddled with 5%, 10% or 15% of SNAP benefits costs in their state starting Oct. 2027, unless the state has an error rate at or above 13.34%, making it eligible for an extension.

Democrats said expanding the two-year extension to all states, rather than just those with the highest error rates, would give other states the same flexibility.

Senate Agriculture Committee ranking member Amy Klobuchar said as the law currently stands, mid-range error rate states like her home of Minnesota would have to pay millions to continue SNAP benefits in the state, while states with higher error rates “get off scot-free” for two years.

“It’s not just about the time, it’s about the equal footing,” Klobuchar said in her opening remarks. “And while again, I appreciate that one year has been included in this bill ... it is a Band-aid because one year from now, again, you’re going to have the same thing play out.”

The error rate issue dominated conversation, even on amendments that proposed other changes.

Sen. Michael Bennet, a Colorado Democrat, said exemptions for states with the highest error rates was “completely irrational” as it means when certain states lower their error rates, they are now on the hook to pay, whereas they otherwise would have been exempt for two years.

“If you are interested in, and I’m sure everybody

here is, in creating a set of incentives that actually will lead to better results, that will allow us to attack fraud and abuse and waste in these systems, that is not the system that we have today,” Bennet said.

Sen. Roger Marshall, R-Kansas, questioned why his colleagues across the aisle felt states would be incapable of lowering their error rates in the offered time span.

“Why is it a misconception that we don’t think that these states can get their error rates down in the next year and a half?” Marshall said. “Is that just impossible to expect that the states can become more competent?”

Senate Majority Leader John Thune of South Dakota said Boozman’s amendment for a one-year delay would give states “a chance to get in compliance.”

“We’ve got to get a bill, if we want to pass a farm bill, that’s something that can pass the House and be signed into law by the president,” Thune said. “So the negotiations around this were with that in mind.”

Sharon Parrott, president of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, said in a statement the Senate’s farm bill proposal would have been a “step in the right direction” but ultimately “doesn’t do enough for people losing the help they need to afford groceries.”

Parrott said states are adding access barriers to SNAP, and thus enrolling fewer people, in an effort to lower their error rates that will leave them on the hook for millions in the upcoming years.

“When Congress returns

this fall, policymakers must work on a bipartisan basis to advance legislation that addresses the unfolding crisis without making deeper cuts to food assistance in later years,” Parrott said.

OTHER FARM BILL CONSIDERATIONS

While SNAP policy has dominated farm bill debate in both the House and the Senate, the bill also stipulates the policies that farmers rely on for things like indemnity payments, or conservation work, marketing assistance, disaster payments and support for rural development.

Boozman said he wanted to “put more farm into the farm bill” with the Agricultural Act of 2026, or as he called it the Farm Bill 2.0.

While the initial draft of the bill omitted year-round, nationwide access to E15, a fuel blend with 15% of ethanol, an updated version included the provision, much to the support of committee members across the aisle.

Farm states and agriculture commodity groups have pushed for many years for year-round, nationwide E15 legislation, since the added ethanol demand would boost corn demand.

National Corn Growers Association President Jed Bower said Thursday the association was “extremely disappointed” the Senate committee was unable to pass the bill that “was particularly important to corn growers.”

“We implore senators to approve a bipartisan farm bill that extends consumer access to E15 and serves the interests of America’s

farmers,” Bower said in a statement. “We are running out of time in this Congress and urge action as quickly as possible.”

Klobuchar said that while it would be preferable to pass E15 as part of a farm bill, she would push for a standalone vote to get the policy passed in the Senate.

Senators debated other amendments to the bill, including additional support for specialty crop farmers, reform to disaster grants and conservation program expansions.

Senators did not debate language that would block laws like California’s Proposition 12, which stipulates certain proteins sold in the state must come from animals raised under specific animal confinement regulations. Proponents of the Save Our Bacon Act say it protects interstate commerce and shields farmers from costly upgrades to comply with the state rules.

Many animal rights and environmental groups opposed the language and celebrated that senators kept it out of the bill discussion.

“A Farm Bill that fails to protect farmers from corporate consolidation, invest in real climate solutions and ensure healthy, affordable food for all is not a solution – it’s just more of the same,” Food & Water Watch Food Policy Director Rebecca Wolf said in a statement. “Senate Democrats were smart to reject this deeply flawed Republican bill. They must continue to do so in September.”



GREG THOMPSON/The News-Enterprise

Darrell Bird watches the tribute video Saturday evening that he and his wife, Tina, put together in honor of Dennis Parrett, longtime friend and supporter of the Cecilia community.

PARRETT

FROM PAGE A1

the morning dew.

“Dennis told me one time that he would give his right arm to be a farmer,” Danny said. “That made no sense to me whatsoever.”

Danny, on the other hand, would rather be playing baseball, basketball or golf. It was anything but farming for the then 11- or 12-year-old.

The stories of “working on the farm” Danny would tell others were very different in contrast compared to the ones that Dennis told. Dennis had a strong work ethic and enjoyed farm work. Danny picked cucumbers for pickling – but not with the same amount of enthusiasm.

At the Cecilia Days event, Danny also wondered what people were going to be saying about his brother.

There was no concern that anything unkind would be said. Rather, Danny was curious what thoughts were running through the minds of others.

A mixture of gray clouds loomed over Cecilia with a threat of showers.

“It wouldn’t dare,” Darrell Bird said of the possible rain, waiting for the evening’s light to fade further before the tribute and video began.

Darrell and his wife, Tina, spent about two weeks preparing the tribute, watching and digging through years of video archives of Cecilia’s Almost Talent Show, stretching all the way back to 1998. Many of the clips came from Gina Ryan and Hardin County Educational and Community Television, who digitized the videos.

“Gina was a lifesaver,” Darrell said.

It was an emotional but fun project, according to

Tina.

“It was fun to go back and look at how much fun it really was. When you’re doing it, you don’t think about it being that much fun, ‘cause it was so much work,” Tina said. “We laughed and then it got a little emotional, and it will tonight, I’m sure.”

Darrell agreed that there were a lot of mixed emotions.

“It’s sad to think he’s not here anymore. We were amazed at how many different ones (shows) he was in. We were testing it the other night and half the time we were laughing, half the time we were crying,” Darrell said.

Dennis’ wife of 41 years, Lisa, his daughters, Devan and Dayna and mother-in-law Martha Thomas said they were not present for the tribute due to the still-rav pain of their loss, but they appreciated the tribute in Dennis’ honor.

Whether acting as master of ceremonies or acting in the various skits that made the Almost Talent Show so much fun, watching Dennis in the clips brought many smiles and a lot of laughter for immediate and extended family who were present for the tribute.

“We’re ending it (Almost Talent Show) the same way Dennis always did,” Darrell said. “He loved ‘God Bless the USA’ and I found a video online – it’s just like, phew.”

The tribute ended with the song as everyone stood, some holding their hand over their heart, some singing along, others with tears sliding down their face.

The tribute was a reminder of the joy that Dennis brought to so many, not just on that one day a year, but throughout his lifetime.

CECILIA

FROM PAGE A1

laughing.

Greg, who was emptying trash cans, had already conceded the race, or so it was thought. Lisa believed he dropped out due to fear and the possible embarrassment of losing.

“I know she’s gonna whip me,” Greg said.

Sometime, while riding around on a Gator, Greg managed to post a social media plea soliciting help and donations to push him at least past Lisa.

Toward the end of the night, \$600 had been raised in the only mayoral race where it’s legal to buy votes. Lisa Thomas was named the Honorary Mayor of Cecilia.

The Louis Crosier Service Award, also referred to as the Citizen of the Year Award, was given to Michael Wimp.

As the majority of attendees hung around the food, ice cream, entertainment and vendors, a smaller crowd gathered at the South Hardin Ballpark for



GREG THOMPSON/The News-Enterprise

Riding in the Cecilia Days Parade with Sheriff John Ward on Saturday, Kristen Parrett tosses bubble gum out of the window.

the Tractor Games.

Logan Richardson signed up to compete in a few of the contests.

“Aiden was a couple years old when I got into it,” Richardson said of his son, trying to think back.

“I’m 20 if that helps your math,” Aiden said.

Logan has earned about

a dozen trophies over the 18 years of competition. Sheer skill, focus and whether or not Gerald Hill, Tyler Pence or Noah Pence were competing determined if he had a chance.

“Tyler used to come out here and beat me when he was a snot-nosed little kid,” Logan said.



GREG THOMPSON/The News-Enterprise

West Hardin Middle School Lakers cheerleaders bring the energy during Saturday’s Cecilia Days Parade.

There’s no time for practice on the farm, and Logan would rather wait to see if he’s still got it this one time a year.

“Makes it more exciting,” said Logan. “It’s a lot of fun. It really is.”

The games are divided into several events – egg cracking, the hot dog eating contest, one called backseat driver and others such as the slow forward tractor

race and slow reverse tractor race. That’s right, who can go drive their tractor the slowest.

In the third heat of the forward slow race, Jonathan French was on his International Harvester 547, Adam Bunnell on a Ford tractor and Randall Ray on a John Deere.

French and Bunnell were not able to move slow enough to capture the title.

“Randall was in creeper mode,” French said. “I was in Low-1 gear.”

By mid-afternoon, many had left but came back for the final few events, bringing the 55th Annual Cecilia Days to a close. The BBQ Chicken Dinner sold out just like years past, serving as a sign of the busy but successful event.