

Top Chef TV reality show's Michael Colicchio didn't mince words. Citing the 2013 National Food Policy Scorecard, Colicchio basically labeled certain conservative lawmakers such as U.S. Sen. James Inhofe as "zeroes" for their food policy related votes. On Wednesday, a day after the nonprofit Food Policy Action released its second annual scorecard, the conservative National Center for Policy Research let out a big burp, followed by a warning to Americans to take the report card and board member Colicchio's opinions with a grain of salt. "This scorecard is a sham," Jeff Stier, the center's senior fellow, huffed. "It does not reflect the consensus of top food policy experts. Rather it represents the narrow view of a select group of some of the nation's most ideologically divisive activists." Tim Carman, quoted Stier in the Dec. 11 Washington Post, as saying the scorecard has all the validity of an "NRA scorecard on gun ownership, but they're playing it off as otherwise, which I think is misleading." Senators were graded on six food policy-related votes and representatives on 13 votes over the past year. Oklahoma's delegation had one of the lowest combined scores in the country. Out of a possible score of 100 percent, Inhofe received 0 percent, down from 11 percent last year, and Sen. Tom Coburn, scored 25 percent, down from 33 percent in 2012. Second District Rep. Markwayne Mullin scored 8 percent and Fifth District Rep. James Lankford came in at 15 percent. Third District Rep. Frank Lucas, chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, scored 23 percent. Lucas has worked doggedly to wrap up a Farm Bill. First District Rep. Jim Bridenstine and Fourth District Rep. Tom Cole also received a 23 percent. The scorecard analyzes votes on everything from hunger, food safety and food access to farm subsidies, animal welfare, food and farm labor, nutrition, food additives, food transparency, local food, organic food and the impact of food production on the environment. Of 87 lawmakers who scored a perfect 100 percent on the scorecard, only one, Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, was a Republican. There is no question that food has become more political in 2013, Food Policy Action Board Chairman Ken Cook

said. "Hardly a day goes by when policymakers aren't debating whether to cut SNAP (formerly food stamps), reform farm subsidies, roll back food safety standards, reduce the use of antibiotics, pay food workers a living wage or set standards for the humane treatment of farm animals." Lawmakers received points for voting "no" on major issues such as cuts to SNAP or "yes" on other issues such as labeling genetically modified foods. Members of Congress voting the opposite way, received no points. More lawmakers scored a perfect 100 this time " 87, compared to 50 last year " but 254 members of Congress this year also scored "worse," a relative term, compared with the 2012 scorecard. Lawmakers have fought for months " or is it years? " over the Farm Bill. The major bone of contention is the size of cuts in food stamps for the poor. Enrollment in food stamps has doubled and the cost of the program nearly tripled since 2004. Nearly 140 House and Senate members saw their scores increase. The score card, which appears to show a deep liberal-conservative schism, doesn't reflect the cooperation members often exercise among themselves. Last week, Republican Coburn, a 25-percenter, and California Democrat Sen. Diane Feinstein, an 83-percenter, worked together, proposing a repeal of federal mandates to blend corn-based ethanol into gasoline made and used in the U.S. Coburn and Feinstein are not alone in believing that corn should be reserved for human consumption, not feeding cars. Food stamps, an issue included in the scorecard, is not given to easy compromise. Decisions on cuts divide down party lines, with Democrats avoiding cuts and Republicans supporting them. Division over food assistance remains the No. 1 issue standing in the way of passage of the Farm Bill legislation.

Take out certain hot-button debates, and most Americans probably tend to think about national food policies as green issues, not as a black-or-white issues and certainly not a red-or-blue issues. The scorecard, flawed or not, indicates otherwise. Julie DelCour, 918-581-8379