



Senator Stabenow’s Bill Would Create Several Programs to Address Challenges to the Food Supply Due to COVID-19

On May 21, 2020, Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) introduced the “Food Supply Protection Act of 2020,” S. 3840, with 9 cosponsors, including Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer. Sen. Stabenow is influential as the Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. The bill would create several programs to address some of the challenges the food supply system faces due to COVID-19. It includes grants and loans for employers, farmworker organizations and others. The programs in the bill would be administered by the Secretary of Agriculture. Specifically, the bill would:

1) Create Loans and Grants That Could be Used to Meet Business Needs and Address Job Safety Related to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Under the bill, the USDA would establish a program of loans and grants for small and medium agricultural businesses, farming cooperatives, and farmworker organizations. The bill designates several purposes for use of the funds, including investments by businesses in equipment, technology, and supplies. Funds may also be used for educational materials regarding COVID-19, test kits, disinfectant, sanitary systems, hand washing stations, personal protective equipment, and other measures to protect workers against COVID-19.

2) Create Infrastructure Grants to Food Banks and Other Nonprofit Food Providers.

The bill supports the expansion of services from food banks and nonprofits that provide food aid. These providers could obtain funds to upgrade equipment, expand refrigeration and transportation, cover rental costs, and prepare and distribute food for the community.

3) Create Partnerships to Reduce Food Waste and Feed Families.

The bill would allow states and tribes to purchase surplus food that would go to waste from farmers and donate it to food banks and nonprofits. Additionally, cooperatives, processors and farmers may partner with nonprofits and apply directly to the USDA for reimbursement.

Sen. Stabenow’s bill is one of the legislative solutions Farmworker Justice supports to help farmworkers during the pandemic. In addition to providing financial resources to farmworker organizations and businesses to address job safety issues related to COVID-19, the funds for food banks and nonprofits could be beneficial to farmworker families, who often face food insecurity. However, as with most legislative proposals, the bill’s impact will largely depend on the effectiveness of its implementation.