

HEROES Act has Important Benefits for American Farmers and Farmworkers



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House of Representatives is about to pass the Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions (HEROES) Act stimulus package, backed by Speaker Nancy Pelosi. The plan includes a 15 percent increase in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) aka “Food Stamps” benefits, raising the minimum payment by \$30 per month. It would give the USDA an extra \$10 billion to cover the rise in SNAP spending, along with fresh funding for child nutrition programs (\$3 billion), the WIC program (\$1.1 billion) and food banks (\$150 million).

The bill also would block the Trump administration from implementing new rules (issued before the pandemic) that would remove millions of low-income Americans from the program. The Trump proposal has been heavily criticized for seeking to deny benefits during a time when food insecurity is rapidly rising across America and community food banks are overwhelmed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, the bill proposes a new dairy donation program, meant to dissuade farmers from dumping milk by rerouting goods to feeding programs; \$100 million earmarked for specialty crop growers; \$50 million for beginning farmers and ranchers; direct aid for processing facilities that shut down because of coronavirus outbreaks; and assistance for producers forced to euthanize livestock because of slaughterhouse closures.

The Heroes Act also directs the Labor Department to step up health protections and financial aid for essential workers, and aims to overhaul small business loans including the so-called Paycheck Protection Program. These measures are critical because of the current pandemic.

Perhaps most important to American agriculture overall, the legislation would implement changes to expand rural broadband service. A relatively unknown fact outside of the farming industry is that American agriculture depends on electronic communications and internet access to operate the technological advances that have increased yields and expanded ag outputs. Yet over 18 million people in the U.S. have [no access to broadband service available at any price](#). Many of these people live in rural areas. In February of 2020, [the FCC created the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund](#) to extend the reach of broadband networks deeper into rural America. The two-phase Rural Digital Opportunity Fund is set to launch later this year. Phase I will target census blocks that are *wholly* unserved with broadband at speeds of 25/3 Mbps. Broadband providers will participate in what's called a reverse auction in which the entity that bids for the lowest amount of subsidization will win the support to build a network in an unserved area. many rural areas across America, there is little to no connectivity. The HEROES Act directs the FCC to expedite the broadband extension process, including the addition of funding to create accurate broadband maps by October 1, 2020.

America's farmers need these reforms, which ultimately serve the best interests of all Americans.



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