

Senate effort to block food labeling of modified food stalls

March 16 2016, by Mary Clare Jalonick

Senate Republican efforts to stop mandatory labeling of genetically modified foods have stalled.

The Senate, on a 48-49 vote Wednesday, fell short of the necessary numbers to move ahead on legislation that would have barred states from requiring the labeling. Vermont is set to require such labels this summer, and other states are considering similar laws.

The procedural vote is a setback for the [food industry](#), which has lobbied to block Vermont's law.

The industry argues that [genetically modified organisms](#), or GMOs, are safe and the labels could be costly for agriculture, food companies and consumers. Congressional Republicans have opposed a patchwork of state laws and worked to find a solution on the issue before Vermont's law kicks in.

Genetically modified seeds are engineered in laboratories to have certain traits, such as resistance to herbicides. The majority of the country's corn and soybean crop is now [genetically modified](#), with much of that going to animal feed. Corn and soybeans also are made into popular processed food ingredients such as [high-fructose corn syrup](#), corn starch and soybean oil. The food industry says about 75 percent to 80 percent of foods contain [genetically modified ingredients](#).

The Food and Drug Administration says they are safe, and there is little

scientific concern about the safety of those GMOs on the market. But advocates for labeling say not enough is known about their risks. Among supporters of labeling are many organic companies that are barred by law from using modified ingredients in their foods.

Those advocates have been fighting state by state to enact the labeling, with the eventual goal of a national standard.

Republican senators were hoping to find compromise with Democrats who have supported mandatory labeling. The chairman of the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee, GOP Sen. Pat Roberts of Kansas, tweaked the bill that advanced from his committee this month to require the Agriculture Department to measure whether [food companies](#) were using voluntary labels. If not enough companies were doing so in three years, the department would require the labeling.

But that wasn't enough for most Democrats.

Michigan Sen. Debbie Stabenow, the top Democrat on the committee, said she worked until late Tuesday night to try to find agreement with Roberts. She said she agrees that GMOs are safe, but "a growing number of American consumers want to know more about the food they eat. And they have the right to know."

She said she believes that it is still possible to find compromise on the issue and she is still talking to Roberts about the legislation.

The House passed a bill blocking the [state laws](#) last year.

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