



Department of Social Development and World Peace

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • FAX 202-541-3339

WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG/SDWP

October 4, 2007

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman, Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Max Baucus
Chairman, Finance
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Harkin and Chairman Baucus:

As your Committees prepare to act on the 2007 Farm bill, we ask that you develop a Farm bill that reflects the best of our national values – a commitment to feed the hungry, effective support for those who till the land, fairness and equity for farmers and ranchers, and stewardship of the land. We especially support efforts to target agriculture resources to those who need help the most rather than those who need it least.

We urge you to include carefully developed and effective reforms to U.S. food and farm policy to create a more just and equitable Farm Bill for U.S. farmers and ranchers. Such policy should include a safety net for families who till the land and resources to feed the 35 million people who struggle with hunger each day. We also urge you to support policies that promote thriving rural communities, encourage good stewardship of the land, and do not unfairly harm farmers in developing countries, most of whom are women who depend on agriculture to support their families.

We lead a community of faith that is present in rural America and in rural communities around the globe. Our community is comprised of farmers and farmworkers, land owners and contract growers, business owners and workers, - and hungry people and those who feed the hungry. We know from personal experience how the Farm Bill affects us all, but most significantly, those who are hungry, living in poverty, and struggling to keep farming a viable way of supporting their families.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, Catholic Charities USA, and Catholic Relief Services bring both principles and depth of experience to the farm policy debate. The Catholic community brings the teaching of our Church and the depth of daily rural experiences from communities across the United States and abroad to its role in advocating for a just national food and farm policy. In 2003, the U.S. Bishops stated: “The primary goals of agricultural policies should be providing food for all people and reducing poverty among farmers and farm workers in this country and abroad” (*For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food: Catholic Reflections on Food, Farmers and Farmworkers, 2003*).

As you prepare to bring forward new legislation, we support strong leadership in the following areas:

Domestic hunger: We urge you to build on the improvements in nutrition assistance contained in Title IV of the House-passed 2007 Farm Bill (H.R. 2419), which provide \$4.2 billion in new investments over the next five years to:

- further strengthen food stamp benefit increases, especially for the minimum monthly benefit and standard deductions;
- revise the restrictive resource limits of \$3,000 for households with seniors or persons with disabilities, and \$2,000 for all other households so that families suffering from unemployment, lack of full-time employment, illnesses, or other financial emergencies may access food stamp benefits without exhausting critical resources; and
- restore food stamp eligibility to such vulnerable groups as adult legal immigrants banned from participating during the first five years after their legal entry to the U.S. and parents with a past drug conviction. These provisions unfairly penalize the children in these low-income households.

International food security: We urge you to secure adequate funds for fighting chronic hunger overseas by providing:

- a “safe box” dedicated exclusively to development food aid to address chronic hunger and long term food security;
- greater flexibility in the use of monetary funds under Sec. 202(e) of Title III and local purchase of food in order to more effectively address the needs of hungry persons; and
- increased resources for Title II and McGovern-Dole education-nutrition programs.

Rural Development and Conservation: We urge you to strengthen our nation’s commitment to active farmers and rural communities by redirecting savings to programs that assist the poor and hungry and that promote effective support for rural development and encourage responsible stewardship of the land.

Steps towards greater fairness: The current farm safety net is broken. It reaches too few farmers and often leaves behind farm families who struggle to make a decent living in agriculture. The “safety net” requires annual “fixes” that are inadequate and costly and create on-going uncertainty for farmers. In addition, there are aspects of our farm supports that result in policies and subsidies that are unfair to farmers in poor countries. We urge you to:

- Establish strong and meaningful payment limits similar to those proposed by Senators Dorgan and Grassley in order to target farm supports to struggling family farmers (particularly beginning and limited-resource farmers who often lack access to these programs);
- Make Title I more equitable and just, by promoting diversity of production and entrepreneurship and offering support where and when it is needed regardless of crop

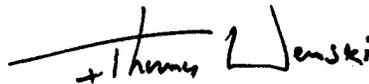
grown. We support efforts to provide a real farm safety net that tie support payments to farmer's income rather than crop prices. This approach would reduce trade distortions, better prepare U.S. farmers to compete fairly in a global marketplace, and reduce undue harm to the most vulnerable farmers around the world.

In the face of severe budgetary constraints, we urge you to make the hungry and farmers most in need of help your first priorities as you consider the 2007 Farm Bill. We will do all we can to help you create and pass a Farm Bill that feeds the hungry, helps the most vulnerable farmers, and strengthens rural communities in their critical role as stewards of God's creation.

Sincerely,



Most Rev. Nicholas DiMarzio, Ph.D., D.D.
Bishop of Brooklyn
Chairman, Domestic Policy Committee
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops



Most Rev. Thomas G. Wenski
Bishop of Orlando
Chairman, Committee on International Policy
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops



Rev. Larry Snyder
President of Catholic Charities USA



Timothy J. Kautza
Executive Director (interim)
National Catholic Rural Life Conference

Letter to Chairman Harkin and Chairman Baucus
October 4, 2007
Page 4

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ken Hackett", written in a cursive style.

Ken Hackett
President
Catholic Relief Services

cc: Members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
Members of the Senate Committee on Finance