



**National
CATHOLIC RURAL LIFE
Conference**



November 1, 2013

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow, Chairwoman
United States Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran, Ranking Member
United States Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Cochran:

As you work to finalize the 2013 Farm Bill, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, joined by Catholic Relief Services, Catholic Charities USA, the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, urge you to negotiate a bill that reflects a commitment to the common good. Agriculture policies must adequately respond to the needs of the most vulnerable and hungry people, and farmers and families at home and abroad.

Congress and the Administration face serious challenges in how best to craft our nation's agriculture policies, especially in the broader context of the budget debates. These choices are more than economic and political: they are moral decisions with profound human consequences. We have serious concerns about using the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or other programs that serve poor and hungry people, to find savings in the Farm Bill. Reductions should not come at the expense of vulnerable people in need.

In his recent message for World Food Day, Pope Francis cautioned, "It is a scandal that there is still hunger and malnutrition in the world..." This scandal compels us to respond not only to the immediate needs of hungry people but ultimately to "achieve a just and lasting solution." As you deliberate in conference committee on the Farm Bill, we call on you to support the following priorities:

Domestic Hunger and Nutrition: Food is a basic need and a fundamental human right. With continued high unemployment and underemployment, people need assistance. We support ten-year funding in the Farm Bill for domestic nutrition programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), and the Commodity Supplemental Food Assistance Program (CSFP).

- Reject cuts and structural changes to SNAP that will harm vulnerable children, seniors, unemployed and underemployed people, and persons with disabilities.
- Reject provisions to eliminate access to SNAP for people who have committed, at some point in their lives, certain violent felonies. People who have paid their debt to society, and their families, should not continue to be punished for the sins of the past.
- Reject provisions tied to state "work requirements" that simply remove people, including parents with children as young as one, from SNAP due to their inability to find a job in an economy with continued high unemployment. People who want to work, and their families, should not be punished because of local economic conditions outside their control.

International Food Security and Development: It is essential that as a nation we reach out in support to our brothers and sisters around the world impacted by hunger, malnutrition, and natural disasters.

- Maintain adequate funding for long-term development programs that help poor farmers grow more food in the Food for Peace program by supporting the \$400 million provided to these programs in Section 3012(b) of the House Farm Bill.
- Make food aid more efficient and thus able to reach more people with the same level of funding by adopting sensible reforms such as Sections 3001, 3008, 3201(c) and 3207 in the Senate Farm Bill.

Rural Development: Rural communities are a treasure of our nation's economic and cultural landscape. They deserve our support to help them grow and thrive.

- Strengthen rural development initiatives that help farmers as well as rural communities grow local economies through grants and loans that offer a sustainable path for development.
- Support needed grants to help beginning, socially disadvantaged, and small and mid-size farms and ranches; rural entrepreneur and microenterprise assistance programs; and increased access to broadband services to underserved rural communities.

Conservation: Farmers and ranchers, like all of us, are called to use our natural resources responsibly for ourselves and future generations.

- Protect conservation programs from further cuts. The *Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)* and *Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)* help small and moderate-sized farming and ranch operations to be better stewards of the land.
- Support the Senate provision to maintain conservation compliance for receiving subsidies for crop insurance premiums.

Subsidies: Farmers and ranchers deserve support in times of need. However, farm supports must be prioritized for small and medium-sized farms and ranches who have incurred significant losses and struggle to compete with larger industrial agriculture.

- Support the House and Senate proposals to end direct payments.
- Support the Durbin-Coburn provision in the Senate Farm Bill which modestly reduces crop insurance premium subsidies by 15 percentage points for farmers who make more than \$750,000 a year.
- Rather than target SNAP and other programs that serve poor and hungry people, find savings in the Farm Bill by reducing fraud and wasteful spending in the crop insurance subsidy program.

In the face of budget constraints, the 2013 Farm Bill is an opportunity to address broken and outdated agriculture policies. We call on you to shape a Farm Bill that redirects help away from those who need it least to those who need it most. A just and fair Farm Bill will put poor and hungry people first, serve small and medium-sized family farms, promote sustainable stewardship of the land, and help vulnerable farmers and rural communities at home and abroad.

Sincerely,



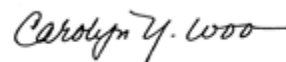
Most Rev. Stephen E. Blaire
Bishop of Stockton
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development



Most Rev. Richard E. Pates
Bishop of Des Moines
Chairman, Committee on International
Justice and Peace



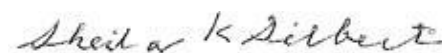
Rev. Larry Snyder
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Mr. James F. Ennis
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