



March 16, 2016

The Honorable Jerry Moran, Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food
and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley, Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food
and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Moran and Ranking Member Merkley:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committees on Domestic Justice and Human Development and International Justice and Peace, Catholic Charities USA, Catholic Relief Services and Catholic Rural Life, we wish to address the moral and human dimensions of FY 2017 Agriculture Appropriations. We urge you to support robust funding for both domestic and international food aid, and for conservation and rural development programs, and to resist cuts to them. Many of these program areas have already been subject to reductions. Further cuts would be harmful to vulnerable people and communities.

In *For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food*, the U.S. bishops wrote, "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." Adequate nutrition is essential to protect human life and dignity. We must also promote good stewardship of the land and natural resources. In our soup kitchens and parish food pantries, we see the faces of poor and hungry people every day. As a faith community, we feed those without work, pregnant women and children, and seniors on limited incomes.

We acknowledge the difficult challenges Congress and the Administration face to match scarce resources with real needs. But a just spending bill cannot rely on disproportionate cuts in essential services to poor and vulnerable people.

The nation continues to see historic levels of food insecurity that have persisted well beyond the end of the Great Recession, and this reality is confirmed by the experience of our food banks, pantries, and congregate meal sites. Catholic Charities agencies continue to provide food services well above pre-recession levels, with agencies reporting 10.4 million food services delivered to clients, a 64 percent increase from 2007. Despite our increased efforts, more than 48 million Americans (nearly 1 in 6) live in food insecure households. With this reality, our nation must prioritize programs that assist poor and hungry people and promote good stewardship. In addition to refraining from making cuts that impact programs like SNAP, which provide greater levels of food security to millions of people, it is vital to provide robust funding for the following programs:

WIC: Fund the Women, Infants, and Children nutrition program at **\$6.37 billion** to ensure that all qualified families receive vital nutritional support, investments are made in technology to improve program operations, and sufficient reserves are built to prepare for economic volatility. In particular, we urge investment of \$75 million in management information systems and technology to assist with the transition to electronic benefit transfer (EBT) systems to help streamline operations.

TEFAP: Provide **full funding levels as required by the 2014 Farm Bill** for the Emergency Food Assistance Program and food distribution grants in local communities. Cuts to the program could force some of our parishes and other charities and food pantries to turn away hungry people when they continue to need our help.

CSFP: Fund the Commodity Supplemental Food Program at **\$236 million** to ensure adequate food assistance is provided to the growing population of low-income seniors. Faith communities and other charities are essential in providing food packages to hungry seniors in their local communities and, as the population continues to age, our ministries are experiencing increasing demand for food services from seniors that must be addressed.

CSP: Provide adequate funding for the Conservation Stewardship Program to help farmers better conserve and care for farm land for future generations. Strong conservation programs are necessary to promote good stewardship of creation and provide needed support to family farms.

VAPG: Maintain current funding for the Value Added Producer Grants program to help farmers and ranchers develop new farm and food-related businesses to increase rural economic opportunity and help farm and ranch families thrive.

We also ask you to prioritize international food security programs. With an estimated 805 million people chronically undernourished globally (UN-FAO), our nation must support:

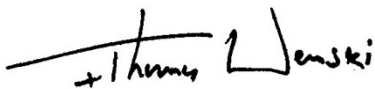
International Food Assistance: The Administration has proposed funding Food for Peace at \$1.35 billion in FY 2017, \$350 million less than what Congress appropriated in FY 2016. Food for Peace provides emergency assistance to people in crises, and is essential to the U.S. response to civil strife around the world as well as to the severe drought in many countries brought on by El Niño. Now is not the time to make drastic cuts to this program. We ask Congress to **maintain Food for Peace funding at \$1.716 billion for FY 2017**. Similarly, we encourage Congress to reverse the Administration's proposed cut to school feeding and **maintain funding for the McGovern-Dole program at \$201.6 million in FY 2017**.

Developmental Food Aid: Congress must protect and direct an adequate amount of Food for Peace funding to development food assistance programs. These programs build resilience, strengthen agricultural capacity, and improve livelihoods for the most vulnerable, reducing the need to provide future emergency assistance. Pursuant to the 2014 Farm Bill, a minimum of \$350 million of Food for Peace resources must be used in development programs, but more may be directed for this purpose. We request that Congress **direct a total of \$375 million of Food for Peace resources to development purposes**, and that USAID have the flexibility to use Development Assistance resources to reach part of this total.

Reforms to Food Aid System: A key reform in the 2014 Farm Bill is the USDA Local and Regional Procurement program, to be implemented in conjunction with McGovern-Dole, which will help responsibly transition school feeding programs to local governments. We request that the full authorized level of \$80 million be provided to the USDA LRP program. Further, we support making food aid programs like Food for Peace more efficient by allowing them to use local and regional procurement when appropriate to local circumstances and efficiency gains should also be reinvested in programs to expand their reach and not used to justify funding cuts. We also encourage Congress to explore changes to agricultural cargo preferences to reduce costs to food aid programs, as a means to achieve greater efficiencies.

At a time of continuing budgetary constraints and competition for agricultural resources, the needs of those who are hungry, poor and vulnerable should come before assistance to those who are relatively well off. With other Christian leaders, we urge the committee to draw a "circle of protection" around programs that serve those in greatest need and to prioritize their needs first. We urge you to protect and fund programs that feed hungry people, help the most vulnerable farmers, strengthen rural communities and promote good stewardship of God's creation.

Sincerely yours,



Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski
Archbishop of Miami
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development



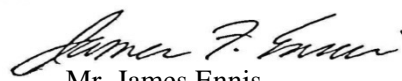
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