



Catholic  
Charities  
USA®



## Ask House and Senate Farm Bill Conferees to Pass a Fair Farm Bill that Targets Support to Those Who Need It Most

*March 11, 2008*

### UPDATE:

The House and Senate are due to complete work on the Farm bill (H.R. 2419) by March 15, 2008. There are significant differences between the House and Senate versions of the bill, particularly on the levels of spending. Both bills, however, will require increased spending over the five-year estimate provided by the Congressional Budget Office of \$286 billion. An impasse in negotiations between the House and Senate has developed around where to get an additional \$10 billion and which priorities to spend it on. Meanwhile, President Bush has threatened to veto the bill because of too much spending and too little reform.

There may be another short-term extension passed this week to allow time for pending negotiations, but unless agreement is reached, a long-term extension of current law could be a likely outcome. This would abandon long sought improvements to essential nutrition programs, the Food Stamp Program, The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), a “safe box” for Food for Peace developmental food aid and other essential improvements. Clearly, an extension would not include much-needed reforms to farm subsidy programs which the Senate and House bills currently lack but could be sought in the Conference Committee process.

### IMMEDIATE ACTION REQUIRED:

Please contact your Senators and Representatives (U.S. Capitol switchboard is 202-224-3121), especially Senate Conferees (Senators Harkin, D-IA; Leahy, D-VT; Conrad, D-VT; Baucus, D-MT; Lincoln, D-AR; Stabenow, D-MI; Chambliss, R-GA; Lugar, R-IN; Cochran, R-MS; Roberts, R-KS; and Grassley, R-IA) and members of the Senate Finance Committee ([www.finance.senate.gov](http://www.finance.senate.gov)). House Conferees have yet to be announced, so target House Agriculture Committee members (<http://agriculture.house.gov>), and members of the House Committee on Ways and Means (<http://waysandmeans.house.gov>). Urge them to do two essential things:

- 1) **Preserve and adequately fund essential and overdue improvements to domestic nutrition programs, international food aid, conservation and rural development.**
- 2) **Take effective action to target agricultural subsidies to those who need them most and not those who need them least.**

Specifically, urge members of Congress to actively support the following specific priorities:

- Domestic Hunger: Provide strongest possible nutrition improvements and investments in the Food Stamp Program and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP);
- Global Hunger: Allow needed flexibility in addressing hunger abroad by supporting the Senate-passed version of Title III that sets aside without a waiver \$600 million of PL 480 Title II resources for those suffering from chronic hunger, and ensuring that a \$25 million pilot program is authorized for the purchase of food locally, with mandatory funding;

- Farmer Fairness: Act to effectively target farm payments to those who need them the most and to those who are actively engaged in farming by setting a genuine payment cap at \$250,000 per farming operation, as proposed in the Dorgan-Grassley payment limitation amendment which passed the Senate, but failed to get the needed 60 votes.

#### **BACKGROUND:**

The House Agriculture Committee approved a farm bill (H.R. 2419) in July 2007. The bill contains important improvements in the areas of nutrition, food aid, rural development, and conservation, which the Catholic community and others have sought for a long time. However, it fails to significantly reform and target farm subsidies that allow large payments to farmers that need them least while offering little support for those who need it most. For example, the House legislation caps eligibility for farm payments to individuals with an annual adjusted gross income of \$1 million (\$2 million for married couples), which does not provide for meaningful or effective "limits" that would help spread limited resources more fairly.

The Senate passed its version of the Farm bill (S. 2302/H.R. 2419) in December 2007. This legislation also contained essential improvements to domestic nutrition programs, strengthened international food security, and made improvements to conservation programs.

The Senate failed to pass real payment limitation reform. A majority of the Senate voted for the Dorgan-Grassley payment limitations amendment but failed to adopt it as part of the final bill because it did not have the 60 votes needed for passage. If enacted, the Dorgan-Grassley amendment would target subsidies to smaller and moderate-size farm operations by capping the maximum amount that a two-member farm family can receive at \$250,000—down from the current cap of \$360,000. It would also close egregious loopholes that allow for excessive payments under current law. This change alone would address the growing imbalance which gives more and more farm subsidies to the largest and most affluent farmers and agribusinesses. The realized savings would be redirected towards nutrition, conservation and rural development programs. The Catholic community is still actively working to ensure meaningful payment limits are included in the House-Senate compromise.

#### **USCCB POSITION:**

The U.S. Bishops have stated that "the primary goals of agricultural policies should be providing food for all people and reducing poverty among farmers and farmworkers in this country and abroad." ([For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food: Catholic Reflections on Food, Farmers and Farmworkers](#)).

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), the National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC), Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA), and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) have been and continue to work closely together to support policies in the 2007 Farm Bill that support rural communities and family farms; strengthen and expand domestic anti-hunger programs; promote conservation and good stewardship of the land; ensure safe living and working conditions for farmworkers; promote fairness for farmers in developing countries; and provide food security aid efficiently and effectively to hungry people worldwide.

#### **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:**

To read Catholic community joint letters and action alerts on our priorities and policies in the 2007 Farm bill debate, go to: <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/national/agric.shtml>

#### **CONTACT:**

Roxana Barillas at USCCB (202) 541-3445, [rbarillas@usccb.org](mailto:rbarillas@usccb.org); Fr. Andrew Small OMI at USCCB (202) 541-3153, [asmall@usccb.org](mailto:asmall@usccb.org); or Bob Gronski NCRLC (515) 270-9447, [ncrlcg@mchsi.com](mailto:ncrlcg@mchsi.com); Lucrea Cobbs at CCUSA, (703) 236-6243, [lcobbs@catholiccharitiesusa.org](mailto:lcobbs@catholiccharitiesusa.org); and Brendan Cavanagh at CRS, (410) 951-3065, [bcavanag@crs.org](mailto:bcavanag@crs.org).