



**National
CATHOLIC RURAL LIFE
Conference**



March 6, 2012

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

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

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow and Ranking Member Roberts:

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic Relief Services, Catholic Charities USA, and the National Catholic Rural Life Conference take this opportunity to write as you begin hearings on the 2012 Farm Bill. We ask that you support a Farm Bill that provides for poor and hungry people both at home and abroad, offers effective support for those who grow our food, ensures fairness to family farmers and ranchers, and promotes stewardship of the land. We also urge that this Farm Bill target limited resources, such as subsidies and direct payments, to those farmers and ranchers who truly need assistance to be competitive and successful.

In *For I was Hungry and You Gave Me Food: Catholic Reflections on Food, Farmers and Farmworkers*, the U.S. bishops wrote, "The primary goals of agriculture policies should be providing food for all people and reducing poverty among farmers and farmworkers in this country and abroad." The Catholic community brings both principles and depth of experience to the Farm Bill policy debate. We lead a community of faith that is present in rural America and in rural communities around the globe. 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 life.

As you deliberate on the 2012 Farm Bill, we urge you to consider the following priorities, about which we will communicate in more detail over the coming months:

- **Domestic Hunger and Nutrition:** Food production is unique because it is necessary for life itself. Catholic teaching maintains that food is a basic need and a fundamental right of the human person. With continued high unemployment and a struggling economy, the need for adequate funding levels in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) - (formerly food stamps) and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) are essential. We call on you to support access to adequate and nutritious food for those in need and to oppose attempts to weaken or restructure these programs that would result in reduced benefits to hungry people.
- **International Food Security and Development:** PL 480 Title II food assistance programs combat chronic hunger, build resilience against drought and other natural disasters and provide adequate nutrition for poor families. International food assistance for development should be protected in the development "safe box." Emergency food assistance should be authorized at a sufficient level so that shortfalls do not force disruptive and unplanned draw-downs of development resources. Title II funding should also be made more flexible to increase its impact and efficiency. This can be accomplished by increasing cash resources for programs through 202(e), and by incorporating Local and Regional Procurement (LRP) as a viable mechanism of the food assistance toolkit.
- **Conservation:** We support full funding for conservation initiatives that promote stewardship of the land and environmentally sound agriculture practices. The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) provides needed technical assistance and financial incentives for farmers and ranchers to adopt practices aimed at fostering healthy, productive and non-eroding soils, clean air and water, energy savings and wildlife habitat. We urge you to consider the public health benefits of improving water and air quality as part of the land management practices covered under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

Easement programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) and the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) are also important in helping to protect and sustain our abundant natural resources.

- **Rural Development:** Rural communities and small towns are the backbone of the social and economic life of America. Effective policies and programs are needed to encourage rural development and promote the culture and well-being of these communities. We therefore support Value-Added Producer grants to help beginning, socially disadvantaged, and small and mid-sized farms and ranchers. The Rural Micro-Entrepreneur Assistance Program (RMAP) and access to broad-band telecommunications services are also essential tools.
- **Subsidies:** The Commodity Title was established to provide a safety net for farmers and it is important to continue a reasonable amount of support for our commodity and dairy farmers. In these times of financial hardship, our public policies should call for shared sacrifice. Given current high commodity prices and federal budget constraints, agricultural subsidies and direct payments can be reduced overall, and targeted to small and moderate-sized farms, especially minority owned-farms. Government resources should assist those who truly need assistance and support those who comply with environmentally sound and sustainable farming practices. We also call for a careful consideration of the economics and ethics of subsidizing food to produce fuel.

In the face of budgetary constraints, the 2012 Farm Bill is an opportunity to address our nation's broken and outdated agricultural policies. This is a crucial time to build a more just framework that puts poor and hungry people first, serves small and moderate-sized family farms, promotes sustainable stewardship of the land and helps vulnerable farmers and rural communities both at home and in developing countries. We look forward to working with you as you shape the 2012 Farm Bill.

Sincerely,

+ 

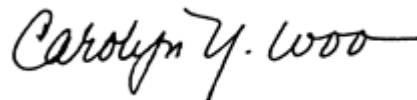
Most Rev. Stephen E. Blaire
Bishop of Stockton
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development

+ 

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



Rev. Larry Snyder
President,
Catholic Charities USA



Dr. Carolyn Y. Woo
President,
Catholic Relief Services



Mr. James F. Ennis
Executive Director,
National Catholic Rural Life Conference