



**National
CATHOLIC RURAL LIFE
Conference**



June 17, 2013

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

As the House prepares to act on the 2013 Farm Bill, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic Relief Services, Catholic Charities USA, the National Catholic Rural Life Conference and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul take this opportunity to share our priorities for food and agriculture policies.

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. Limited resources, such as subsidies and direct payments, should also be targeted in the Farm Bill 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 knows from personal experience in communities at home and throughout the world 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 the 2013 Farm Bill, we urge you to consider the following priorities:

- **Domestic Hunger and Nutrition:** The fact that food is a basic need and a fundamental human right makes food production unique in meeting this essential human need. **The bill reported by the Committee includes over \$20 billion in cuts to SNAP. These cuts should be rejected.** With continued high unemployment and a struggling economy, the need for adequate funding levels in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and other programs that help hungry people, are essential. Congress should support access to adequate and nutritious food for those in need and oppose attempts to weaken or restructure these programs that would result in reduced benefits to hungry people including immigrant families and those who have paid their debt to society.
- **International Food Security and Development:** The Food for Peace program saves people's lives in times of dire emergencies and combats chronic hunger in poor communities around the world. We have consistently supported increasing cash resources for local purchase and replacing monetization. These reforms to Food for Peace would give implementers more flexibility to employ interventions best suited to local conditions. **We urge the House to adopt any amendments, such as the Royce-Engel amendment that provide this kind of flexibility in how Food for Peace resources may be used,** while maintaining an authorizing framework for emergency and development programs. We also urge the House to reject any amendments that seek to cut funding for Food for Peace or other international food assistance programs.

- **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, such as subsidies for crop insurance, should assist those who truly need assistance and support those who comply with environmentally sound and sustainable farming practices.
- **Conservation:** Much needed conservation programs have been weakened by reductions and inaction. Conservation initiatives should receive full funding in order to 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. Congress should 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 our 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 to help rural communities thrive.

Sweeping legislation such as the Farm Bill invariably involves compromise. However, elements of the Committee-passed Farm Bill fall short, especially the dramatic cuts to SNAP. 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 urge you to pursue the common good in agriculture and food policy and to reject the demands of narrow interests.

Sincerely,



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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
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