

USCCB and National Catholic Partners Respond to Farm Bill Conference Committee Bill

January 29, 2014

WASHINGTON— The chairmen of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committees on Domestic Justice and Human Development and International Justice and Peace, along with representatives of Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Catholic Charities USA, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and Catholic Rural Life, responded to the agreement of the Farm Bill Conference Committee, commending their ability to set aside partisan differences to advance a farm bill.

“While we are disappointed that the final compromise continues to call disproportionately for sacrifices from hungry and poor people in this country and around the world, especially when large industrial agricultural operations continue to receive unnecessary subsidies, we are glad to see support will continue for domestic and international nutrition and development aid, rural development and conservation,” said Archbishop Thomas Wenski of Miami, chair of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development.

USCCB and its Catholic partners have been vocal in their opposition to harmful cuts and changes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The Farm Bill Conference Committee proposal calls for a reduction of \$8.6 billion to SNAP over ten years by increasing the threshold at which persons receiving the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) may receive SNAP benefits. However, the bill does include increases for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP).

Father Larry Snyder, president of Catholic Charities USA, and Sheila K. Gilbert, president of the National Council of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, expressed concern for the challenges that organizations like Catholic Charities agencies and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul face every day in trying to meet the needs of people in their communities.

“We continue to be concerned that those who are most vulnerable will bear the greatest burden when cuts are being considered in any programs that address poverty in this country,” said Father Snyder. “However, we realize that tough choices may have to be made and encourage our country’s decision-makers on this 50th anniversary on the War on Poverty to commit to ensuring that millions of our brothers and sisters are not being left out or left behind.”

Bishop Richard E. Pates, chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace, and Carolyn Woo, president of CRS, expressed support for the bill’s international food assistance funding, particularly for development programs, and reforms that increase program efficiency and provide more tools to combat hunger. “With one in eight persons around the world struggling to feed themselves each day, we welcome the renewed commitment by Congress to programs that tackle root causes of chronic hunger and appreciate its foresight in making programs more cost effective so we can serve more people with the limited resources available,” said Bishop Pates.

In addressing agriculture reform James Ennis, executive director of Catholic Rural Life stated, "We are disappointed to see that necessary reforms to farm commodity programs and payment levels have been struck down in the final bill," Ennis said. "Congress needs to close loopholes and set real payment limits. By doing so, the farm bill will help to save hundreds of millions of dollars and take a step towards leveling the playing field for all family farmers."

USCCB has worked closely with its Catholic partners urging Congress to finalize a Farm Bill that prioritizes poor and hungry people, serves small and medium-sized family farms, promotes sustainable

stewardship of the land, and helps vulnerable farmers and rural communities in the U.S. and around the world.

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