



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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The U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, we wish to address the moral and human dimensions of the FY 2013 Agriculture Appropriations legislation. The bishops' conference urges you to resist significant cuts to both domestic and international food aid and conservation and rural development programs. Major reductions at this time of economic turmoil and rising poverty will hurt hungry, poor and vulnerable people in our nation and around the world.

In *For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food*, the 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 urge support for just and sufficient funding for agriculture policies that serve hungry, poor and vulnerable people while promoting good stewardship of the land and natural resources. In our soup kitchens and on our parish doorsteps, 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 a limited income. The Catholic community at home and abroad includes farmers, ranchers, farmworkers and business owners who grow food, care for the land and help rural communities prosper.

The bishops' conference acknowledges the difficult challenges that Congress, the Administration and government at all levels face to match scarce resources with growing needs. A just spending bill cannot rely on disproportionate cuts in essential services to poor and vulnerable persons; it requires shared sacrifice by all.

As pastors and teachers, we believe these are economic, political and moral choices with human consequences. Our bishops' conference has offered several moral criteria to help guide difficult budgetary decisions:

1. Every budget decision should be assessed by whether it protects or threatens human life and dignity.
2. A central moral measure of any budget proposal is how it affects "the least of these" (Matthew 25). The needs of those who are hungry and homeless, without work or in poverty should come first.
3. Government and other institutions have a shared responsibility to promote the common good of all, especially ordinary workers and families who struggle to live in dignity in difficult economic times.

We address the following programs as they reflect a priority for poor and hungry people and promote good stewardship:

DOMESTIC PROGRAMS

WIC: The Women, Infants, and Children nutrition program is fully funded at \$7.04 billion in the President's FY 2013 budget. With record high child poverty (1 in 5 children), a cut to this program would harm some of the most vulnerable people in our country.

TEFAP: The Emergency Food Assistance Program receives appropriations funding for food storage and distribution grants in local communities. Cuts to the program could force some of our parishes and other charities to turn away hungry people when they continue to need our help.

SNAP: The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly food stamps), received a \$2 billion cut made to the reserve fund in the 2010 child nutrition bill. Restoration of funding is necessary as families continue to struggle with joblessness and poverty.

CSFP: The Commodity Supplemental Food Program provides food assistance to low-income seniors, pregnant and breastfeeding women and infants and children. Adequate funding is needed to help faith communities and other charities provide food packages to hungry people in their local communities. Reductions will result in a loss of food for thousands of low-income seniors.

CSP: Adequately fund the Conservation Stewardship Program to help farmers 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. In addition, restore funding for the Rural Micro-entrepreneur Assistance Program (**RMAP**) - which was eliminated in the FY 2012 funding bill - to help small businesses develop and grow in rural communities.

INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

Food for Peace: The President's Budget proposal calls for a 4.5% cut to the Title II Food Aid program from the FY 2012 appropriated levels, which is a 20% cut from the FY 2010 level. Such substantial cuts over just two years will undoubtedly lead to an unacceptable loss of life for those in dire circumstances.

Safe Box: Congress must protect Title II Food Aid funds to development programs by preserving the "safe box" provision. Programs funded through the safe box help chronically hungry communities build lasting agricultural capacity that minimizes the impact of severe weather and other catastrophes.

Local and Regional Purchase: Direct funds to the Local and Regional Procurement (LRP) of food commodities. As demonstrated in the pilot program funded by the 2008 Farm Bill, LRP can reduce the cost of food assistance, shorten delivery times, and improve overall response for both emergency and development programs.

202e Funds: Increase the amount of cash resources in the Title II program. The distribution of food alone is not enough to stimulate sustainable development. Agencies like Catholic Relief Services use these funds to operate nutrition education programs that save the lives of mothers and children and for agricultural programs that increase the quality and amount of food that poor farmers produce. Increasing cash resources would also reduce the need to sell U.S. food in developing countries to generate cash to support such programs (monetization).

Priorities and Subsidies

The bishops' conference supports farm safety net programs such as crop insurance and disaster assistance that are targeted to the needs of small to medium sized farmers and ranchers. Savings should be used to fund hunger and nutrition programs that serve people in need.

At a time of great competition for agricultural resources and budgetary constraints, the needs of those who are hungry, poor and vulnerable should come before assistance to those who are relatively well off and powerful. With other Christian leaders, we urge the committee to draw a "circle of protection" around resources that serve those in greatest need and to put their needs first even though they do not have powerful advocates or great influence. The moral measure of the agriculture appropriations process is how it serves "the least of these." 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 Stephen E. Blaire
Bishop of Stockton
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development



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