



United States
Conference of
Catholic Bishops

Office of
Domestic Justice and
Human Development



CATHOLIC RURAL LIFE



Catholic
Charities
USA®



June 25, 2025

The Honorable John Boozman
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry
United States Senate

The Honorable Amy Klobuchar
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry
United States Senate

The Honorable Glenn “GT” Thompson
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Angie Craig
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives

Dear Chairman Boozman, Ranking Member Klobuchar, Chairman Thompson, and Ranking Member Craig:

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic Relief Services, Catholic Charities USA, Catholic Rural Life, and the U.S. Society of St. Vincent de Paul share a commitment to addressing and alleviating hunger and recognize that the Farm Bill plays a crucial role in this pursuit. As we celebrate the legacy of Pope Francis, we must remember his message: “Hunger is criminal, food is an inalienable right.”¹ Agriculture policies should promote the production and access to nutritious food for all people to address the devastating reality of hunger in our country and in our world. We ask you to ensure the upcoming Farm Bill prioritizes support for programs that feed the hungry both domestically and abroad, provide a safety net for farmers that ensures resources target small and moderate-sized family farms and vulnerable farmers, seek the well-being of rural communities, and sustainably steward the land.

In 2025, the Church is celebrating a Jubilee Year themed “Pilgrims of Hope” and in this spirit we continue to encourage Congress to work together to pass a just Farm Bill.² After a full Congress without passage of a comprehensive, updated Farm Bill, it is time to meet the needs of the hungry, farmers, rural communities, and our common home. We hope that the tradition and spirit of bipartisan cooperation that has stewarded past Farm Bills can be maintained by continuing to take into account the coalition of diverse interests that recognizes the alignment of the needs of farmers and families struggling to put food on the table. It is especially alarming that the budget reconciliation process has involved drastic cuts and structural changes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). We urge you to protect and strengthen SNAP to ensure additional burdens are not placed on low-income families and individuals through the budget reconciliation package. Administrative

¹ Pope Francis, Address to the Participants in the World Meeting of Popular Movements (Oct 28, 2014). https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papafrancesco_20141028_incontro-mondiale-movimenti-popolari.html

² Letter to Congress Regarding 2023 Farm Bill (April 24, 2023). <https://www.usccb.org/resources/letter-congress-regarding-2023-farm-bill-april-24-2023>; Letter to Congress on the Farm Bill (May 22, 2024). <https://www.usccb.org/resources/letter-congress-farm-bill-may-22-2024>

actions taken this year have also resulted in cuts or terminations of several vital programs in the nutrition and agriculture space, impacting international food aid, food banks, school meals, and conservation efforts.³ There is a continuing threat that these cuts will be codified through a rescission request. Please utilize your legislative authority to safeguard vital programs that Congress has authorized and funded in the past from harmful administrative actions and protect against further cuts that harm those who are hungry and the farmers who feed them.

As you deliberate on how best to proceed with the upcoming Farm Bill and any other legislation that addresses issues of agriculture and nutrition, we reiterate the following principles and areas that should be prioritized:

Domestic Hunger and Nutrition: Food is a basic need and a human right. Food production and distribution are critical national concerns. The most recent reports from the U.S. Department of Agriculture indicate that 47.4 million people in the United States lived in food-insecure households in 2023. This urgent need must be addressed, and funding for programs that feed hungry families must be prioritized. The following programs and measures are critical to meeting the needs of hungry people.

- **SNAP** helped feed an average of 42.1 million people per month in 2023 and lifted nearly 3 million out of poverty. It is responsive to increased and decreased periods of need and continues to have one of the lowest fraud rates for federal programs. **SNAP should be strengthened** through updates to calculations that account for rising food prices, improvement to the standard medical deduction, elimination of the cap on the Excess Shelter Deduction, and increased benefits for households with young children. Additional funding would be helpful for SNAP Employment and Training as well as SNAP Education. We are deeply concerned about proposals that would undermine recent updates to the Thrifty Food Plan so that it fails to accurately reflect the cost to feed a family with a healthy diet, increase cost burdens for states, further restrict eligibility, and impose additional and burdensome work requirements. We cannot support policies that act as a cut to SNAP, including cuts to future benefit amounts and increased state cost-sharing measures, or that weaken the efficacy of or access to this vital program.
- We also ask you to consider **expanding SNAP eligibility** in the following ways: improve the Asset Limit to incentivize building savings, allow states to use State Median Income (SMI) rather than the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) to determine eligibility, and raise income eligibility above the current 130% FPL to a reasonable measure based on inflation. All U.S. territories should fully participate in SNAP and be brought into parity with the states.⁴ State flexibility around waiving or scaling back work requirements should be preserved given present and future economic uncertainties, and the three-month time limit for Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs) should be eliminated. Furthermore, it's unconscionable that any members of the armed services and their families should have food security issues, and access should be improved for military families. Access should also be improved for students, lawfully

³ Several Catholic Charities agencies recently reported notifications from USDA cancelling or suspending food deliveries under the Local Food for Schools Cooperative Agreement Program and/or Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program, resulting in significant reductions in food supplies from food banks or local farmers, which are critical food sources for families and school meal programs, and serious difficulties to meet the growing nutrition needs in our communities.

⁴ Currently, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands receive approximately 60% of what states receive under SNAP, while other U.S. territories (Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands) have parity with state funding levels. This inequality should be resolved.

present immigrants and refugees, and seniors. Formerly incarcerated individuals should be able to access SNAP. Investments should be made in greater food sovereignty for Tribal Nations. SNAP outreach and enrollment can also be improved, for example, through a single point of entry, preapproval for those affected by disasters, and technological assistance for states.

- **The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)** should be strengthened through additional mandatory funding, allowing the Department of Agriculture to retain the authority to purchase bonus commodities in times of high need and low prices, increasing support for the Farm to Food Bank program without the state match requirement, and supporting policies to make food donation easier.
- We ask you to **increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables** through programs such as the **Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Incentive Program (SFMNP)**, the **Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP)**, and through **infrastructure support to food banks** for refrigeration and distribution of fresh produce.

International Food Security and Development: We ask that the Committee continue to steadfastly support international food assistance programs, including **Food for Peace, McGovern-Dole Food for Education, Food for Progress, and the Farmer-to-Farmer programs, in addition to the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust.** These programs keep famine at bay, improve the livelihoods of smallholder farmers so they can feed their families, help school children excel in their studies, and leverage the expertise of American farming volunteers to support food security outcomes. We hope the Committee will maintain important reforms included in the 2014 and 2018 Farm Bills. Prior legislative changes helped improve the self-reliance of the families and communities being served, such as eliminating the monetization requirement in Food for Peace, making funding available for local and regional procurement (LRP) in McGovern-Dole, and allowing the pairing of Community Development Funds with Food for Peace development activities to strengthen and enhance the impact of these programs. **We will continue to support changes that are cost-efficient and help the programs be effective in reducing hunger and malnutrition in the near and long-term so they can reach as many people as possible.**

We understand there are ongoing discussions about who should administer Food for Peace. **While our organizations do not have a formal position on where Food for Peace should be managed, it is imperative that interruption of program services be as limited as possible.** If operational structures change, program operations must be maintained, including the logistics required to maintain food aid pipelines. We believe this period of change can be managed as long as funding continues to be made available at the highest levels possible and that the personnel resources are maintained to ensure there is capacity and expertise to run the program with timely decisions, strong accountability and oversight.

Conservation: The Catholic Church urges an integral ecology that recognizes a “certain reciprocity: as we care for creation, we realize that God, through creation, cares for us.”⁵ Programs that focus on stewardship of working and retired lands and easements and partnerships, such as the **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)**, **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)**, **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)** and **Agriculture Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)**, should

⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace (Jan 1, 2010). https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliii-worldday-peace.html

receive special attention. Conservation programs should also include solutions to address carbon capture, climate mitigation, adaptation, food waste and ensuring access for all these programs to applicants who experienced historic disparities and discrimination, especially Black farmers. These programs give a sabbath to the land, protect farmlands against natural disasters, preserve ecosystems, and support farming and fishing livelihoods by improving soil and water health.

Subsidies: The Commodity Title was established to provide a safety net for farmers. It is important to continue support for commodity and dairy farms, as well as specialty crops, to encourage diversified production. It is imperative to protect against cuts to the USDA that would impact its ability to place staff in rural communities to help farmers diversify crops, get access to new markets, and receive assistance on technical issues. Given federal budget constraints, agricultural subsidies and direct payments must be targeted to small and moderate-sized farms, especially those of Black farmers and other historically marginalized groups, and payment limits must be enforced. Government resources should assist those who truly need assistance and support those who comply with environmentally sound and sustainable farming practices. Lastly, subsidy levels should not lower the international market price of commodities to the detriment of local farmers in resource poor countries.

Rural Development: Rural communities and small towns are an essential component of the social and economic life of America. Yet, their viability is jeopardized by slow economic improvement, aging infrastructure, the opioid epidemic, under-employment, and the movement of younger generations to other communities. Effective policies and programs are needed to encourage rural development and promote the culture and well-being of rural America. Young farmers and their families should be supported and encouraged to fortify the profession and strengthen the national food supply. Climate change mitigation and adaptation must be integrated into rural development policies by, for example, adding climate resilience to **Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural America (ATTRA)** program services and increased funding for climate research through USDA's **Research, Education, and Economics (REE) Mission Area**. Crucial rural infrastructure investments, as well as innovative programs not funded in the permanent Farm Bill baseline, deserve to be emphasized, such as the **Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP)**, **Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI)**, and the **Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program, Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural America (ATTRA)**, among others.

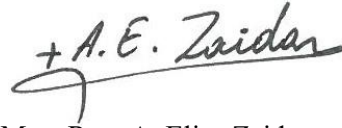
Now is a critical time to “hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*”,⁶ to consider the needs of the hungry, of underserved farmers, and of rural communities. We look forward to working with you as you shape the next Farm Bill.

⁶ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, no. 49 (May 24, 2015).
https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

Sincerely,



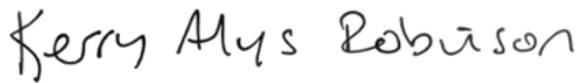
Most Rev. Borys Gudziak
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Most Rev. A. Elias Zaidan
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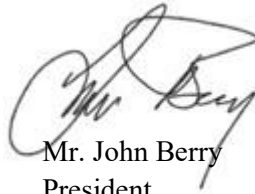
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