



United States
Conference of
Catholic Bishops



Catholic
Charities
USA®



CATHOLIC RURAL LIFE

April 28, 2026

Dear Senator/Representative:

We write on behalf of Catholic organizations that provide support to the poor and vulnerable, assist migrants and refugees, and protect the preborn. Today we address the moral and human dimensions of the FY2027 Agriculture Appropriations legislation.

Food insecurity is on the rise globally, and the United States is not an exception. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), 13.7 percent (18.3 million) of U.S. households experienced food insecurity at some point during 2024.¹ While the inflation of grocery prices has leveled off significantly since 2022, the USDA predicts prices will continue to rise by 3.1 percent in 2026.²

It is difficult to make ends meet for many, and families need help. On World Food Day, Pope Leo XIV emphasized the importance of eradicating hunger, detailing that: “only through sincere and constant cooperation can we build fair and accessible food security for all.” Only by joining hands can we build a dignified future in which food security is reaffirmed as a right and not a privilege.”³ Nutrition programs that support the basic right to food should be strengthened. We must work to ensure every person has enough nutritious food to sustain a life with dignity, promote good stewardship of the land and natural resources, and provide support to struggling farmers, ranchers, and workers.

We urge Congress to increase funding for the critical programs listed below. At a minimum, we urge maintaining FY2026 funding levels for these programs. The devastating cuts and structural changes made to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) through the budget reconciliation process, along with administrative actions impacting international food aid, food banks, school meals, and conservation efforts, have made the need to ensure adequate funding for vital USDA programs more important than ever. Please utilize your legislative authority to safeguard 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.

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC): Vulnerable moms, infants, and young children receive healthy food and nutrition support through WIC. This support is vital and must be maintained for all families in need. We are grateful for Congress’s efforts to ensure full funding of the WIC nutrition program in FY2026 in light of rising food costs and increased program participation. Again, we implore Congress to **fully fund WIC at no less than the same level as FY2026 (factoring inflation and WIC’s growing caseload)** so that all eligible families who apply for WIC will receive access to life-saving nutrition and health services. The recent

¹ Rabbitt, M.P., Reed-Jones, M., Hales, L.J., Suttles, S., & Burke, M.P., U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Economic Research Service, [Household Food Security in the United States in 2024](#) (December 2025).

² USDA, Economic Research Service, [Food Price Outlook Summary Findings](#) (March 25, 2026).

³ Pope Leo XIV, [Address on World Food Day](#), (October 16, 2025).

science-based updates to the WIC food program, including an **increased fruit and vegetable benefit**, will help families receive proper nutrition and introduce nutrient-dense foods to their diet. Please **protect these improvements** and continue Congress's long history of bipartisan support for WIC. We also ask that you **allow for permanent virtual service delivery for WIC**, a flexibility enjoyed by many families set to expire September 30th of this year.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): Nearly 42 million Americans relied on SNAP for basic nutrition in 2024 and the program lifted 3.6 million people out of poverty the same year.⁴ SNAP is responsive to periods of increased and decreased need, and fraud in the program is rare.⁵ Despite our disappointment with the cuts made by Congress in the 2025 reconciliation bill, we continue to ask Congress to **ensure adequate funds for SNAP**, provide additional funding for state employment and training programs; and to reinstate SNAP-Education funding, including case management to help low-income families find work and self-sufficiency.

We ask that you **allocate funds to the SNAP contingency fund** to ensure one month of costs are fully funded in case of further government shutdown or national emergency. SNAP should be strengthened through updates to calculations that account for rising food prices, improvements to the standard medical deduction, elimination of the cap on the Excess Shelter Deduction, and increased benefits for households with young children. **SNAP access should be improved** for students, military families, lawfully present immigrants and refugees, and seniors. Formerly incarcerated individuals should be able to access SNAP. All U.S. territories should participate in SNAP and be brought into parity with the states.

State flexibility around waiving or scaling back work requirements should be restored, given present and future economic uncertainties. We also ask that you **delay the newly created state cost-sharing requirements for SNAP benefits and administrative expenses by one to two years** to allow states more time to reduce their error rates and prepare for cost-shifts, especially in light of the government shutdown last fall which certainly increased error rates. A measured delay would allow states adequate time to plan and fix error rates and would help prevent disruptions in access to nutrition assistance for vulnerable households.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP): The TEFAP program is the backstop for food security in communities across the country, providing roughly 20 percent of food distributed by local hunger-relief organizations. We urge Congress to strengthen the program through additional funding, allowing the USDA 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, investing in infrastructure for refrigeration and distribution of fresh produce, and supporting policies to make food donation easier.

Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP): Faith communities and other charities are essential in providing food packages to hungry seniors in their local communities. Please maintain full funding for CSFP to help ensure adequate food assistance is provided to the growing population of low-income seniors.

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP): For over 50 years, CACFP has supplemented the diets of vulnerable Americans by providing nutritious meals and snacks. We ask Congress to increase

⁴ Emily Shrider and Christina Bijou, U.S. Census Bureau, [Poverty in the United States: 2024](#) (September 2025).

⁵ Congressional Research Service, [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Errors and Fraud](#) (April 7, 2025).

funding for CACFP to continue supporting the health and wellness of the over 4.4 million Americans served by this program.

Access to Nutritious Food: More communities have access to locally grown food thanks to the **Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP)**. The program also helps underserved farmers and ranchers start new farm and food-related businesses to increase rural economic opportunity and help rural communities thrive. Please maintain 2018 Farm Bill mandatory funding adjusted to inflation for LAMP to expand access to local fresh and nutritious food. We also ask Congress to provide funding to increase access to fresh produce through programs such as the **Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Incentive Programs** and the **Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP)**.

Conservation: The Catholic Church urges an integral ecology which recognizes that “as we care for creation, we realize that God, through creation, cares for us.”⁶ Strong conservation programs are essential to enhancing natural resources and environmental protection, and they provide needed support to family farms. Conservation programs should also include solutions to reduce food waste, promote carbon capture, and help farmers, the land, and wildlife habitats. We ask Congress to provide the highest funding levels possible for these programs.

The **Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SARE)** focuses on land stewardship, innovative farming techniques, and improving farmer livelihoods and profitability. Please increase funding for the **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)**, which funds the **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)**, **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)**, **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)**, and the **Agriculture Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)**. These are cornerstone programs focused on stewardship of working and retired lands, easements, and partnerships. Please provide an additional \$1.05 billion for **Conservation Operations and Conservation Technical Assistance** within the NRCS for the effective administration of USDA conservation programs and support for farmers, ranchers, and private landowners across the country to voluntarily implement effective conservation practices. This funding should not be taken from the funding allocated for the programs.

Subsidies: It is important to continue support for **commodity and dairy farms**, as well as **specialty crops**, to encourage diversified production. We advocate 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.

Rural Housing: USDA’s rural housing programs help support rural residents and agricultural workers. We ask Congress to preserve affordable rural rental housing through adequate funding for **Section 514 and 515 programs** and the **Multifamily Preservation and Revitalization Demonstration**. Please ensure that sufficient **rental assistance** and **rural housing vouchers** are available to keep these units affordable to rural workers and families.

International Food Assistance and Development: U.S. funding for international food assistance programs promote U.S. interests and can be life-saving and life-affirming. The cries of those who go

⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, [Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace](#) (January 1, 2010).

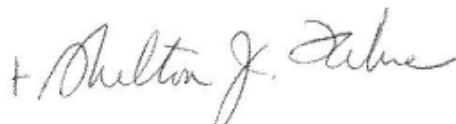
to bed hungry each night continue to echo from Sudan to Haiti and beyond. Given the projected needs, we ask Congress to provide the highest funding levels possible to Food for Peace Title II and the McGovern-Dole Food for Education Program:

- **Food for Peace Title II (FFP):** As authorized by the Farm Bill, these funds provide food from the U.S. to vulnerable people in need of emergency food aid due to disasters and conflicts. In an effort to disrupt the cycle of dependence, a small portion of FFP funding facilitates chronic hunger crises activities (also known as RFSAs). Additionally, Food for Peace supports the Farmer-to-Farmer program, matching U.S. farming volunteers and agriculture experts with development programs overseas. FFP is an America First foreign assistance tool that can also strengthen local markets, help families improve their food security and economic well-being over the long-term, and ultimately transition aid recipients to potential trade partners. We ask that Congress support no less than \$1.5 billion for Food for Peace Title II.
- **McGovern-Dole International Food for Education Program:** This program, authorized by the Farm Bill, is for school-feeding and education in developing countries, using U.S.-sourced food commodities and funding activities that strengthen educational outcomes. Local and national governments also contribute to the program's success. In FY2023 alone, host-country governments contributed more than \$130 million of their own funds towards school feeding programs in addition to making policy commitments to support their ownership of the program and its goals. The program demonstrates the U.S. can maintain its commitment to healthy childhood development and secure a stable, more peaceful future with a strong workforce among partners. We ask that Congress support the program with no less than \$240 million for the McGovern-Dole program.

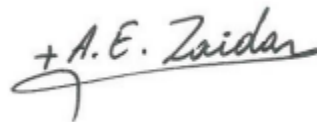
Finally, any work that aims at ensuring justice and the means of flourishing for every human being cannot be separated from the protection and well-being of women and preborn children. To that end, we strongly encourage Congress, including in the agriculture appropriations process, to **protect the dignity and sanctity of human life in all conditions and stages**. We especially urge Congress to counteract policies that facilitate and promote access to chemical abortion through the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Mothers in need and their families deserve authentic support.

Thank you for your consideration and efforts to protect and fund programs that support families, feed hungry people, help the most vulnerable farmers and farmworkers, strengthen rural communities, and promote good stewardship of God's creation. We look forward to working with you as the appropriations process advances.

Sincerely yours,



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Most Reverend A. Elias Zaidan
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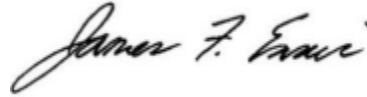
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