

Testimony Submitted for the Record

On behalf of the

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops,

Catholic Relief Services,

and

National Catholic Rural Life Conference

before the

*House Committee on
Agriculture*

*“Formulation of the 2012 Farm Bill:
Commodity Programs and Crop Insurance”*

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Table of Contents

The Nutrition Title and Catholic Experience.....	1
International Food Security and Development and the Catholic Experience.....	3
The Conservation and Rural Development Titles and Catholic Experience.....	5
Subsidies and the Farm Safety Net.....	7

Introduction

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and the National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC) are grateful for the opportunity to provide this testimony for the hearing on *Formulation of the 2012 Farm Bill:*

Commodity Programs and Crop Insurance. The Catholic community brings a unique perspective and our everyday experience deeply rooted in this country and around the world, especially rural communities. We see first-hand, farm and ranch families losing a way of life, rural communities losing viability and hungry children struggling to have a decent life.

We bring to these discussions moral principles drawn from our faith and everyday experience. Our clear directions for U.S. agriculture policy are driven by our conviction that current policies leave too many behind in the communities we serve. By our own efforts and our advocacy on public policy priorities we seek to help provide adequate nutrition for poor and hungry people at home and abroad; offer support to those who grow and harvest our food, fairness to family-run farms and ranches; and to promote stewardship of the land through effective conservation programs. In our soup kitchens and on our doorsteps, we see the faces of poor and hungry people every day. We feed those without work, pregnant women and children, and seniors living on a limited income. For many of them, the meal they receive from our ministries is the most nutritious meal they receive that day.

In *For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food: Catholic Reflections on Food, Farmers and Farmworkers*, the U.S. bishops stated: “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.” As a community of faith, we believe that food is a right of all people and that hunger is a direct threat to the life and dignity of millions of people.

Even with a struggling economy, our nation has a moral obligation to ensure that people at home and abroad have enough nutritious food to eat. Together, we call on Congress to support a Farm Bill that sustains and strengthens critical food and nutrition programs for hungry people, strong conservation programs that promote stewardship of creation and fair farm support systems that help family farmers and ranchers thrive.

The Nutrition Title and Catholic Experience

In 2010, nearly 50 million people lived in households that struggled to put food on the table, putting millions of families at risk of hunger and poor nutrition. It is reported that one in five children live in a household that at times ran out of food and one in four Americans participated in a federal nutrition and food program.

Rural America is particularly impacted by hunger, food insecurity and high rates of poverty. Sixteen percent of people in rural communities live in poverty, a rate higher than those living in metropolitan areas. It is ironic and unacceptable that where our food is produced so many people suffer from hunger and food insecurity. The free and reduced school lunch and SNAP programs (food stamps) benefit many of these families struggling to make ends meet.

Serving hungry, poor and vulnerable people is an essential mission of our Catholic faith. As Christians, we are called to serve the “least of these” and “bring glad tidings to the poor.” In our churches, soup kitchens, schools and charitable agencies we serve all people with

compassion and respect. In following the Gospel, we serve others not because they are Catholic but because our Catholic faith compels us to reach out and care for those in need.

Through our Catholic organizations and institutions we are serving the hungry and helping the most vulnerable. For example, in Chicago there are hundreds of Catholic organizations that serve the needs of the city. One of those is Catholic Charities which provides 2.2 million free meals to the hungry and vulnerable each year. That is 6,027 meals a day, in one city. Many of these agencies, parishes, food pantries and schools, along with private resources, partner with government to provide food to hungry people through programs such as **The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)** and the **Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)**.

Today, our Catholic parishes and charities and other local agencies are experiencing significant increases in requests for food assistance due to economic hardship and occasional natural disasters. People who have lost their homes, the unemployed and working people with low wages are turning to us for help. As this need increases, the ability of our organizations to respond becomes more challenging. In 2011, Catholic Charities USA reported that 64% of its local agencies were unable to respond to all requests for assistance in their local communities. A stronger partnership between churches, charities and government must respond effectively to rising needs.

Policy Priorities

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP –formerly known as food stamps) is the first line of defense for people who do not have enough food each month. In 2011, SNAP served more than 45 million households throughout the nation. With the purchasing power of food stamp dollars decreasing and food prices rising, vulnerable people, especially children and seniors, cannot afford to have their benefits cut or reduced.

As you consider the 2012 Farm Bill, we ask you to protect, support and strengthen critical nutrition programs that serve hungry and vulnerable people:

- **The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)** feeds millions of households struggling against hunger, 76 percent include a child, senior or disabled member and 85 percent have incomes that fall below the federal poverty guideline. We urge you to oppose attempts to reduce or make other changes that would decrease critical benefits.
- **The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)** helps low-income families, children and seniors struggling to make ends meet. We urge you to support TEFAP because it ensures that nutritious commodities are distributed to hungry people in communities through faith-based and charitable organizations such as churches, soup-kitchens, food pantries and shelters.
- The **Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)** is a vital program that primarily works to improve the health of low-income seniors, low-income pregnant and breastfeeding women, new mothers, infants and children up to age six. CSFP provides a nutritious monthly food package designed to meet specific nutritional needs and combat poor health conditions. Many of the food packages are delivered through Catholic charities and parish ministries.

The 2012 Farm Bill provides an opportunity to strengthen the food and nutrition safety net. The reauthorization should provide effective access to nutritious food for hungry and vulnerable people at home and abroad, including legal non-citizen residents.

We offer the following recommendations as you consider the 2012 Farm Bill:

- **Prevent cuts or reductions** to the SNAP program. Reductions or technical changes that would result in a loss or erosion of benefits to hungry and vulnerable people must be rejected.
- **Do not erode benefits or promote barriers** to access. States should have flexibility in finding effective ways to feed hungry people and respond adequately to local needs but this should not result in a loss or a reduction in benefits, especially for children.
- **Maintain the current entitlement structure** of SNAP so that it may continue to respond to people suffering as a result of economic hardship or other unforeseen crises.
- **Maintain “categorical eligibility”** for food stamps. People, who receive benefits such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), should also be able to receive food stamps to meet their needs without additional bureaucracy or paperwork.
- **Simplify the application process** to better serve working families and seniors who are underserved by the SNAP program.
- **Review and repeal the current provisions penalizing** low-income families headed by a parent with a past drug conviction.

International Food Security and Development and the Catholic Experience

The rich body of Catholic social teaching gives priority to our poorest brothers and sisters in allocating scarce resources. The Catholic Church works to serve people in countries that suffer hunger, drought, war and other hardships. The Church is a trusted institutional presence that not only brings aid but also compassion and justice to those in need.

For 68 years Catholic Relief Services has successfully implemented humanitarian development programs in one hundred countries around the world. CRS reaches more than 100 million people in more than 100 countries. The mission of CRS is to provide assistance to impoverished and disadvantaged people overseas and serve people based solely on need, regardless of race, religion, or ethnicity. CRS implements its programs through a network of credible local partners, including the local Catholic Church in many countries. This gives CRS the ability to operate in locations that other aid implementers cannot, and to reach a much larger number of people than most other aid groups.

CRS has long been a partner of the U.S. Government in the implementation of foreign assistance programs, including both emergency and development programs funded by Title II of P.L. 480 Food for Peace, and school feeding programs funded by McGovern-Dole Food for Education.

Title II emergency programs save lives when communities are impacted by natural disasters or human conflict. Over the last five years, CRS has implemented six Title II emergency assistance programs in countries like Sudan, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, and Haiti. After the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, CRS fed 90,000 displaced people through school and community based programs and food-for-work programs. CRS also rebuilt critical infrastructure such as roads linking those impacted to critical services.

CRS's Title II development programs address chronic hunger, through food distributions of U.S. produced food commodities and through complementary agricultural development, maternal and child health, nutrition, and water and sanitation programming. Since 2008, CRS has implemented nineteen development programs, twelve of which are still ongoing in Africa, Central America and the Caribbean. One of these ongoing programs is in Ethiopia, where CRS works within a consortium to implement the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP). This program provides supplemental food and cash resources to enable participants to save and invest in household assets such as livestock or small businesses. These savings help families get through disasters, like the devastating 2011 drought, without resorting to negative coping strategies such as eating fewer, less nutritious meals or selling productive household assets such as animals or farming tools. USAID recently reported that the PSNP program helped prevent 7.5 million drought-affected Ethiopians from needing emergency assistance.

The McGovern Dole Food for Education (FFE) programs are carried out by CRS primarily as school feeding programs to support education, child development, and food security for some of the world's poorest children. For instance, in Mali, the FFE program has provided over 5 million meals, as well as vitamins and medication, to children in 120 schools, and has increased school enrollment in these schools for boys by 18% and for girls by 29%.

Policy Priorities

Maintaining strong Title II and McGovern-Dole food assistance programs will allow CRS, local partners and other implementing organizations to meet critical human needs in a more effective and efficient manner.

We offer the following recommendations as you consider international food security and development in the 2012 Farm Bill:

- **Title II Funding:** Title II funding should be maintained at a level commensurate with the need to address both emergencies and chronic hunger. At a minimum, Title II should be reauthorized at \$2 billion each fiscal year, to ensure the U.S. continues its exemplary leadership and foresight in providing international food assistance to the world's poorest people.
- **Protection of Development Programs through the Safe Box:** Development food assistance through Title II's "safe box" is essential, and at minimum should be reauthorized at \$450 million each fiscal year. Development programs funded through the safe box save lives before an emergency occurs by addressing the causes of chronic hunger. Through activities like building irrigation systems, digging latrines, distributing highly nutritious foods, and educating local communities on basic health and dietary practices, Title II development programs help small farmers increase agricultural output, improve community sanitation conditions, and strengthen the health of vulnerable populations. Ultimately, these programs prevent or mitigate the need for

emergency assistance by helping people develop the tools and ability to better cope with drought or other disasters.

- **Build Flexibility in Title II Programs:** Flexibility should be built into Title II development food assistance to allow the programs to be more cost-effective and responsive to the needs of those served. This includes increasing the amount of cash available for programs, expanding the use of cash to all core programming expenses, and authorizing the use of local and regional procurement in appropriate circumstances.

The moral measure of our society is how we treat the “least of these.” We urge Congress to maintain strong funding for the Title II Food for Peace and McGovern-Dole Food for Education programs as part of the 2012 Farm Bill. These are effective programs that feed hungry people abroad and promote development in poor countries. We urge you to resist cuts and changes that would reduce help for hungry and vulnerable people.

The Conservation and Rural Development Titles and Catholic Experience

There is an integral relationship between the food we grow and eat and the land where it is grown. The Catholic Church has a major presence in rural America and in rural communities throughout the world. Our diverse Catholic community includes farmers and ranchers and their families, farmworkers, land owners, contract growers and business owners. These are people of faith who strive to work the land while respecting and caring for the gift God has bestowed on us all. They bring both their skills and the desire to care for the land and natural resources in order to be good stewards of God’s creation.

Just one small example, in LaFayette, Oregon, Brother Chris, a Trappist monk with a forestry background, maintains the forests and hiking trails surrounding the monastery for persons who come on spiritual retreat and reflection. He works to ensure the hills and forests are respected and are a source of inspiration to both members of his religious community and to their many visitors. Brother Chris also manages the forest efficiently to produce periodic income to help meet the financial needs of his self-supported religious community. He uses forestry practices that conserve and promote sustainability so that future generations will be able to enjoy the resources and beauty of the surroundings.

Conservation of land and natural resources is one of the Catholic community’s priorities in the 2012 Farm Bill. We believe it is our responsibility to show respect for our land and natural resources and to safeguard it for the future. Unlike other elements in the Farm Bill, conservation programs have been subject to nearly \$3 billion in cuts through the appropriations process since the last Farm Bill was enacted. Increased adverse environmental conditions and marginal land being converted to row crop production have left the land more vulnerable to severe soil erosion. Conservation programs are important to counteract these affects.

It is also essential to maintain resource conservation and environmental enhancement programs to help sustain family farms and support rural community development. Rural communities and small towns are the backbone of the social and economic life of America. Family farms remain a treasure to our nation and the Catholic community. Rural

communities need investment and resources in order to be successful and to contribute to the economy and their local communities.

Kevin, a former teacher from Wichita, Kansas, recently moved with his family closer to his hometown of St. Leo, Kansas to begin a family farm. His family felt the need to draw closer to the land and pursue a life where they could be good stewards of creation, farm in a sustainable manner and provide for their family. Kevin and his wife Mary, also desire to pass their passion for farming on to their children. Their family exemplifies the Catholic community's commitment to support small to medium-sized family farms and ranches as a valuable source of life and economic development in rural communities.

Policies that target support to highly industrialized farming can cause farm consolidation, further depopulate rural communities and adversely affect small and medium-sized farms. Effective policies and programs are needed to encourage rural development and promote the livelihood and well-being of these communities. In these times of financial hardship, our public policies should call for shared sacrifice and strive to protect rural communities and those most in need.

Policy Priorities

The programs in the Conservation and Rural Development Titles work to preserve the health of America's rural communities, as well as soil, water, and other natural resources essential to the long-term productivity and economic viability of agriculture and forestry. Protecting and responsibly managing our natural resources is critical to the well-being and future of American communities and the common good of all.

We offer the following recommendations as you consider reforms to the Conservation and Rural Development Titles in the 2012 Farm Bill:

- Support strong funding levels that allow for greater participation in the **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)**. Despite great demand, this program has been consistently underfunded in previous budgets. We fully support the original goal of the CSP program to provide environmental stewardship payments for working farms attuned to the common good.
- Consider the public health benefits of improving water and air quality as part of the **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)**. We ask that EQIP, CSP and other conservation programs always target payments to small and moderate size operations. This would encourage wider enrollment while also promoting more vibrant rural communities.
- Maintain the full range of conservation easement programs, notably the **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)** as well as other reserve programs covering Wetlands, Grasslands, and the **Farmland Protection Program**. Beyond ensuring adequate funding for these programs, we see the need for greater coordination in the application, contract and enforcement of these programs.
- Support and adequately fund **Value Added-Producer Grants** to help beginning, socially disadvantaged, and small and mid-sized farmers and ranchers.

- Adequately fund the **Rural Micro-Entrepreneur Assistance Program (RMAP)** and ensure access to broad-band telecommunications services to help rural businesses and communities prosper.

Even in the face of budgetary constraints, we urge clear priorities and policies in the 2012 Farm Bill to promote and maintain strong conservation programs to protect God's creation and encourage rural development and promote the vibrancy and well-being of rural communities.

Subsidies and the Farm Safety Net

We believe that farmers, ranchers and farmworkers deserve just wages, safe working conditions and benefits for them and their families. Farmers also need an effective safety net that helps them mitigate risks from drastic changes in climate and weather patterns and trade distorting policies. Fair agriculture policies must ensure basic income security and provide opportunities for economic initiative for farmers at home and around the world, especially for smaller and medium sized farms and ranches.

Catholic social teaching assesses agriculture and development policies on whether they encourage widespread diversity in farm ownership, advance rural development and safeguard the livelihood of those who grow and harvest our food. We remain concerned that ownership of land and natural resources, and the marketing and distribution of food is controlled by and benefits too few people. We also regret that trade distorting practices can lead to higher food costs and that subsidies often negatively impact the livelihood of farmers in developing countries. These increased pressures especially impact poor and hungry people and particularly children.

The 2012 Farm Bill provides the opportunity to reform Title I to respond to the requirements of justice and strengthen our commitment to active farmers and rural communities offering support where it is most needed as well as redirecting resources to poor and hungry people.

Policy Priorities

The Commodity Title (Title I) was established to provide a safety net for farmers and it is important to continue reasonable support for commodity and dairy farmers. In these times of national and economic hardship, policies should reflect shared sacrifice. Given current high commodity prices and federal budget constraints, agriculture subsidies such as direct payments, can be reduced overall. Direct payments should be targeted to small and medium-sized farms, especially those represented by traditionally underrepresented groups. Government resources should aid those who truly need support and who practice environmentally sound and sustainable farming practices.

We also call for a careful reconsideration of the economics and ethics of subsidizing food to produce fuel. With so many people struggling with hunger and higher food prices, social justice and the pursuit of the common good require us to reconsider how our policies impact the hungry in our communities and in poorer nations.

We offer the following recommendations for your consideration on Title I in the 2012 Farm Bill:

- **Protect small to medium-sized family farms** by ensuring they have access to safety net programs such as farm/crop insurance to mitigate the effects of adverse weather, climate and trade distorting policies. The farmers with the greatest needs should have first claim on agricultural assistance.
- **Establish a reasonable cap on commodity payments** so that smaller producers are protected. The current level of assistance disproportionately favors larger industrial producers. Simply rewarding production undermines the ability of smaller farmers to compete and thrive. For example, corn and cotton producers receive some of the largest subsidies. This can lead to prioritizing land for corn production intended for ethanol for automobiles rather than hungry people. Subsidies that lower cotton prices hurt many cotton farmers in poor developing countries by undermining their livelihood.
- **Significantly reduce trade distorting support programs** that disadvantage farmers in poor countries. Some subsidies, supports, tariffs, quotas and other barriers undermine market access for poorer countries and local producers.
- **Target and redirect savings** from reductions in the Commodity Title to support programs that assist poor and hungry people and encourage responsible stewardship of the land and rural development. Reductions in subsidies should be dedicated first to support domestic nutrition and international food aid and development programs that help people in need. Second, these resources should support adequate funding for conservation and rural development programs that promote stewardship of creation and help rural communities prosper.

Conclusion

The Catholic community brings a unique perspective to the 2012 Farm Bill. Our vision is rooted in our Catholic social teaching tradition and our active presence and experience in the life of rural communities in this country and around the world. Our teaching and experience provide the Catholic community with a view on how agriculture policies affect farm families, hungry children, how the land is cared for, and the viability of rural communities.

These directions for U.S. agriculture policy are shaped by our conviction that current policies leave too many vulnerable people behind. Especially in times of budgetary constraint, a just Farm Bill must prioritize the life and dignity of the human person and the common good of all.