



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3000

WEBSITE: WWW.USCCB.ORG/JPHD • FAX 202-541-3339

May 31, 2011

The Honorable Harold Rogers, Chairman
House Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Norm Dicks, Ranking Member
House Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Dicks:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, we write to address the moral and human dimensions of the current FY 2012 Agriculture Appropriations bill. We express our deep concerns that the current proposal calls for significant cuts to both domestic and international food aid, conservation and rural development programs. These proposed cuts will greatly affect programs that serve hungry, poor and vulnerable people in our nation and around the world.

In *For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food: Catholic Reflections on Food, Farmers and Farmworkers*, the U.S. Catholic 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 a fundamental human right. It is in this context that we urge you to support just and adequate funding levels for agriculture policies that serve the hungry, poor and vulnerable while being good stewards of our land and natural resources.

We wish to clearly acknowledge the difficult challenges that Congress, the Administration and government at all levels face to get our financial house in order. In light of growing deficits, Congress faces difficult choices about how to balance needs and resources and allocate burdens and sacrifices. However, a just spending bill cannot rely on disproportionate cuts in essential services to poor persons.

As pastors and teachers, we offer 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.

A just and fair policy requires shared sacrifice by all. In this spirit, we offer the following programs and recommendations for your consideration:

DOMESTIC PROGRAMS

(WIC) The Women, Infants, and Children nutrition program faces a reduction of \$833 million from FY 2011. At a time when our nation continues to face high unemployment, a cut to this program would harm some of the most vulnerable people in our country.

(TEFAP) The Emergency Food Assistance Program faces a proposed \$12 million dollar cut. As a result, community based organizations would be forced turn away hungry and food insecure people when demand for food assistance remains high.

(SNAP) The proposed \$2 billion cut from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-formally known as food stamps-though taken from the reserve fund, will leave the program unable to adequately respond to increasing demand as a result of worsening economic conditions or further natural disasters and other national emergencies.

(CSFP) The Commodity Supplemental Food Program faces a potential 22% cut from current funding levels which would result in loss of food for well over 100,000 low income seniors.

(CSP) The Conservation Stewardship Program faces a potential \$171 million cut relative to its FY 2012 farm bill-mandated level. This would result in the government renegeing on contracts it has already signed with farmers across the country.

(VAPG) The Value Added Producer Grants program faces a cut of \$12.5 million, nearly a quarter of its authorized level, which also eliminates the Rural Micro-entrepreneur Assistance Program (RMAP) including its farm bill mandatory funding of \$3 million.

INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

(PL-480 Title II) The proposal calls for a drastic cut to the programs by over 30% from the FY 2011 CR level, which itself was an 11.4% cut from the FY 2010 level. A one-third cut in Title II resources over a short two years is likely to result in an unacceptable loss of lives for those in dire circumstances.

(Cargo Preference) An area where the Appropriations Committee could look for savings is the Cargo Preference mandate that 75% of food aid be shipped on U.S. flag carriers. The extra funds to pay shipping costs would be better used to purchase more food commodities for the program.

SUBSIDIES

The U.S. Bishops have consistently supported subsidies targeted in a fair manner that favor small to medium sized farms over large corporate farms. In addition we offer, as an example for savings, a reduction in the corn and cotton subsidies that disproportionately disadvantage farmers in developing countries.

(Biofuels) Given past trends and current prevailing high prices for food products, we recommend that the U.S. Government review the economics and the ethics of subsidies for food for fuel in a way that places priority on the right of the poor in the United States and in the developing world to adequate access to nutritious food, and the promotion of sustainable practices that protect farmland, natural resources and wildlife for future generations.

Although our nation faces budgetary constraints and legitimate concerns for our long term economic stability, we encourage you to support and adequately fund programs that feed the hungry, help the most vulnerable farmers, and strengthen rural communities in our critical role as stewards of God's creation.

Sincerely yours,



Most Reverend Stephen E. Blaire
Bishop of Stockton
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development



Most Reverend Howard J. Hubbard
Bishop of Albany
Chairman, Committee on International
Justice and Peace