



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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June 11, 2013

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

The Honorable Nita M. Lowey, Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Lowey:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, we wish to address the moral and human dimensions of the FY 2014 Agriculture Appropriations legislation. The bishops' conference urges you to resist significant cuts to both domestic and international food aid, as well as 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: Fully fund the Women, Infants, and Children nutrition program at **\$7.141 billion** as reflected in the President's FY 2014 budget. With record high child poverty (1 in 5 children), a cut to this program would harm some of the most vulnerable low-income women, infants, and children in our country.

TEFAP: Provide **\$268 million in commodities** to The Emergency Food Assistance Program for food and distribution grants in local communities. Cuts to the program could force some of our parishes and other charities and food pantries to turn away hungry people when they continue to need our help.

SNAP: Restore the **\$2 billion** that has been cut from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) reserve fund in the 2010 child nutrition bill. Restoration of funding is necessary as families continue to struggle with joblessness, hunger 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 and others.

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

PL-480 Title II: The Administration has proposed shifting Food for Peace funds to different SFOPs accounts as part of its food aid reform proposal. The total amount requested in the President's food aid reform proposal is \$1.45 billion, close to the \$1.5 billion we requested earlier this year. Food for Peace funding in FY13 saw a 5% sequestration cut on top of already reduced funding levels; funding at the \$1.5 billion level will restore needed funding for emergency and development programs at a time of increased needs due to emergencies in places like Syria.

Safe Box: Congress must protect Title II Food Aid funds to development programs by preserving the "safe box" provision and adequately fund it at \$450 million for FY2014. Safe box programs build resilience in chronically hungry communities, strengthen agricultural capacity and household nutrition, minimize the impact of shocks such as severe weather and other catastrophes, and reduce the future need for emergency assistance.

Food Aid Reform: Congress should adopt measures similar to the President's FY2014 food aid reform proposal in the Agriculture Appropriations process. Developmental food aid programs should be provided with cash funding so that organizations like Catholic Relief Services no longer have to monetize food aid. Cash resources for emergency food aid programs would allow greater use of local and regional procurement. These reforms improve efficiency, expand reach to additional beneficiaries, and allow the use of interventions best suited to local conditions.

PRIORITIES AND SUBSIDIES

The U.S. 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. Congress should limit funding of subsidies to these farms rather than supporting larger, wealthier producers, and use the resulting savings 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. With other Christian leaders, we urge the committee to draw a "circle of protection" around programs 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