



## Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • FAX 202-541-3339 • WWW.USCCB.ORG/JPHD

February 21, 2008

Dear Farm Bill House and Senate Conferees:

The Catholic community is deeply engaged in farming, feeding the hungry, and sustaining rural communities in the United States and around the world. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops urges you to finalize a Farm bill (H.R. 2419) that reflects moral principles and the real needs of the most vulnerable farmers and families in the United States and around the world.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic Charities USA, National Catholic Rural Life Conference, Catholic Charities USA and Catholic Relief Services strongly support the important improvements made in the areas of domestic nutrition programs, international food security aid, conservation and rural development. However, the bill lacks essential reforms. We urge you to do all you can to target farm supports to those who need them most and to address the serious inequities that hurt smaller farmers in our country and around the world.

The following should be priorities in a new bill negotiated between Congressional leaders and the Administration:

**Food and Nutrition:** We support ten year funding for domestic nutrition programs, including key improvements to the Food Stamp Program made in the Senate bill. Consequently, we urge you to maintain the strengthening measures in the area of nutrition outlined in the House-passed bill and protect the House-passed funding levels. Food is a basic need and access to food sources is a fundamental right. Therefore, we support ten year funding for the strongest possible nutrition investments in the Food Stamp Program and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) is critical.

In addition, we advocate including the improvements to the International Food Aid program contained in the Senate bill. The Bishops' Conference welcomes the support for global food assistance provisions contained in the Senate-passed version of Title III, particularly setting aside without a waiver \$600 million of PL 480 Title II resources for those suffering from chronic hunger. We regret that current versions of the bill do not contain a local purchase provision making it mandatory for up to 25 percent of Title II resources to be used for local purchase. We ask that you ensure that a \$25 million pilot program be authorized in the final bill, with mandatory funding.

**Real Reform:** Our faith commits us to address poverty and hunger in this country and abroad. We cannot ignore the injustices that are harming those whose livelihoods depend largely on agriculture. Bishops from Senegal, Mali and Burkina Faso came to Congress to share the plight of African

farmers who are disadvantaged in the market place by trade distorting farm supports. In those countries, farmers depend on farming for their livelihoods and yet are unable to feed their families. These farmers often have to choose between sending their children to school and keeping them home to help harvest crops. The Bishops' Conference supports real reform in the current legislation and in the future that will allow farmers here and abroad to make a decent living off the land. A serious re-thinking of our approach to these issues could benefit our farmers and farmers around the world, while stabilizing the situation for the future. We have to move beyond periodic fixes to this broken system.

We urge you to limit farm support payments to well off farmers, remove incentives that lead to a misuse of the subsidy system and mandate effective income caps for eligibility. These are necessary policy prescriptions given existing budget constraints. Meaningful payment limit legislation (i.e. the Dorgan-Grassley amendment) was passed by majority vote in the Senate but unfortunately was not included in the final bill. We encourage you to make meaningful reforms within Title I to respond to those with the greatest needs and create savings that can be used for more urgent priorities.

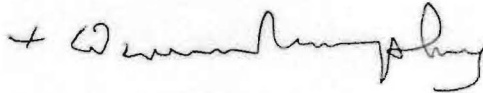
**Rural Development:** While in many ways, U. S. agriculture is currently experiencing a period of record receipts, this can mask the struggle of rural communities around the country that are not effectively served by many of the existing programs. Strengthen rural development initiatives that help farmers as well as rural communities grow local economies through grants and loans that offer a sustainable path for development. We strongly urge you to support needed funding for grants to help beginning, socially disadvantaged, and small and mid-size farms and ranches; rural entrepreneur and microenterprise assistance programs; and access to broadband telecommunications services to underserved rural communities.

**Conservation:** Protect funding for conservation programs, notably the *Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)* and *Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)*, for small- and moderate-sized farming and ranch operations to be better stewards of the land.

As you enter these discussions and final negotiations, we call on you to shape a Farm bill that redirects help away from those who need it least to those who need it most. Exercise leadership in the conference committee process to retain and build on the progress made on domestic nutrition, international food aid and conservation. Your leadership is essential in reshaping a system of farm supports from one which aids those who need the least help to one which targets assistance to those in greatest need. A just and fair Farm bill will strengthen rural communities, protect the common good and serve our one human family.

Letter to House and Senate Conferees on Farm Bill  
February 21, 2008  
Page 3

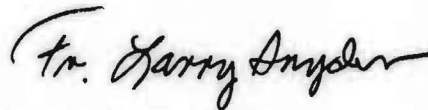
Sincerely,



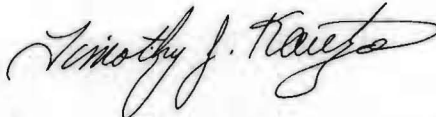
Most Reverend William F. Murphy  
Bishop of Rockville Centre  
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice and Human  
Development



Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski  
Bishop of Orlando  
Chairman, Committee on International Policy



Reverend Larry Snyder  
President of Catholic Charities USA



Timothy J. Kautza  
Executive Director (interim)  
National Catholic Rural Life Conference



Ken Hackett  
President  
Catholic Relief Services

cc: Majority and Minority Leader, Senate  
Speaker and Minority Leader, House  
Members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry  
Members of the House Committee on Agriculture  
USDA Secretary Edward Schaefer  
USDA Deputy Secretary Charles Conner  
OMB Director James Nussle