



National
CATHOLIC RURAL LIFE
Conference



July 10, 2012

The Honorable Frank D. Lucas, Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Collin Peterson, Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Lucas and Ranking Member Peterson:

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic Relief Services and the National Catholic Rural Life Conference wish to share our priorities regarding the House Committee on Agriculture's proposed *Federal Agriculture Reform and Risk Management Act (FARRM)*. We ask that you support a Farm Bill that provides help for poor and hungry people both at home and abroad, offers targeted support for those who grow our food, promotes stewardship of the land and helps rural communities prosper.

In *For I was Hungry and You Gave Me Food*, the U.S. bishops wrote, "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." The Catholic community brings both moral principles and everyday experience to the Farm Bill policy debate. We are a community of faith that is present throughout rural America and in rural communities around the globe. The Farm Bill affects us all, but most significantly, those who are hungry, living in poverty, and those trying to maintain farming as a viable way of life.

As you debate the 2012 Farm Bill, we urge you to consider the following priorities:

- **International Food Security and Development:** The Committee proposal supports food aid for emergencies and wisely allocates \$400 million annually for **Food for Peace** "non-emergency" programs to help combat the underlying causes of long-term hunger in the poorest countries. This funding builds on the documented success of non-emergency programs to address hunger in places like the Horn of Africa, which reduced the need for international emergency food assistance. Also, the new reporting requirements on how international aid implementers use federal funding will help demonstrate the effectiveness of development and emergency food assistance programs abroad.
- **Domestic Hunger and Nutrition:** An increase in funding for **The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)** will help churches, charities and food pantries serve hungry people in our communities. However, the proposal to reduce the **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps)** by over \$16 billion will hurt hungry children, poor families, vulnerable seniors and struggling workers. At this time of economic hardship and continued high unemployment, the Committee should protect essential programs that serve poor and hungry people. To cut programs that feed hungry people in the midst of economic turmoil is unjustified and wrong.
- **Conservation and Rural Development:** Full funding for conservation and rural development programs is essential to promote stewardship of creation and help rural communities thrive. The Committee draft maintains funding for **the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)**, reauthorizes the **Rural**

Micro-Entrepreneur Program and promotes broadband access in rural communities. However, we remain concerned that conservation and rural development programs continue to receive significant cuts.

- **Subsidies and Crop Insurance:** The proposal to eliminate direct payments is a positive step to reform the **Commodity Title**. Agriculture subsidies should be reduced overall and crop insurance should be targeted to help small and medium sized farmers, especially minority owned farms, over larger industrial agriculture. Government resources should help those who truly need assistance and support those who comply with environmentally sound and sustainable agriculture practices. Savings from reductions to agricultural subsidies should be used to support hunger and nutrition programs that feed poor and vulnerable people.

A just Farm Bill requires shared sacrifice by all but cannot rely on disproportionate cuts to essential services for hungry, poor and vulnerable people. We join other Christian leaders in insisting “a circle of protection” be drawn around essential programs that feed poor and vulnerable people, serve small and moderate-sized family farms, promote stewardship of creation and help rural communities both at home and abroad prosper.

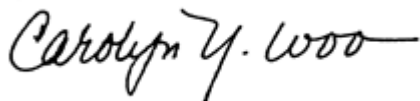
Sincerely,



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



Most Rev. Richard E. Pates
Bishop of Des Moines
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and
Peace



Dr. Carolyn Y. Woo
President,
Catholic Relief Services



Mr. James F. Ennis
Executive Director,
National Catholic Rural Life Conference