

Farm Bill Moving Forward in the Senate: Call Senators Today

Ask Them to Support Amendments that Feed the Hungry and Target Farm Supports to Those Who Need Them Most

December 7, 2007

Starting today, the full Senate is scheduled to begin discussing and voting on *The Food and Energy Security Act* (HR 2419), the version of the Farm Bill approved by the Senate Agriculture Committee in November. We urgently need your help in supporting critical funding for Food Stamps and emergency food assistance; support provisions that provide for global food security assistance; reforms in commodity supports to help smaller and moderate scale farmers; as well as support for conservation programs that benefit all rural communities.

IMMEDIATE ACTION REQUIRED:

Call your Senator(s) now (Capitol switchboard is 202-224-3121). Ask to speak with the staff person who deals with nutrition and agriculture policy. Urge your Senator(s) to:

Vote YES on the Dorgan-Grassley amendment, to better target supports to U.S. farmers who need them. Today 66 percent of commodity payment programs go to 10 percent of our nation's farmers who are the biggest and most affluent farmers. Urge the Senate to pass a fair commodity title that better targets payments to those who need them while closing loopholes that have permitted the powerful to collect multiple payments. The status quo, which directs the majority of payments to large and wealthy agribusinesses while leaving behind the majority of farm families, is unacceptable.

Vote YES on amendments that provide additional funding for Food Stamps and for emergency food assistance (TEFAP). The Senate Agriculture Committee-approved bill contains \$1 billion less in new investments for the Food Stamp Program and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) than the House-passed bill (H.R. 2419). Emergency food centers are experiencing demand for food as well as a reduction in available food to distribute.

Vote YES on amendments that reduce trade-distorting subsidies. Our brothers and sisters who till the land in developing countries, where three-quarters of the population rely on small-scale farming for their livelihood, are struggling to survive in an increasingly global market that stymies their efforts to feed their families and work their way out of poverty.

Support the Food Aid provisions of the bill. Support the committee bill which provides for a "safebox" with no waivers, and sets aside \$600 million of PL 480 Title II resources for development programs. We must protect Title II resources that address chronic hunger, in order to mitigate future emergencies and to help the poorest reach long term food security. Oppose attempts to weaken Committee-passed provisions on Food Aid.

BACKGROUND:

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, National Catholic Rural Life Conference, Catholic Charities USA and Catholic Relief Services have been working together to seek a new kind of Farm Bill that reflects a commitment to feed the hungry at home and abroad, to offer effective support for those who till the land, while promoting fairness and equity for farmers and ranchers. We especially support efforts to target agriculture resources to those who need help the most rather than those who need it least.

The 2007 Farm Bill (H.R. 2419) was approved by the U.S. House of Representatives this summer. The Senate had been stalled in discussing its version of the Farm Bill until Senate Leaders reached a deal on Thursday, December 6 to allow consideration of 40 amendments, 20 on each side, in order to finish the Farm Bill by the Christmas holiday recess. The bill approved by the Senate Agriculture Committee makes important investments in conservation and includes key provisions for beginning farmers and socially disadvantaged farmers. However, more needs to be done to address the inequities in farm supports, especially programs that are trade distorting and that harm farmers in developing countries. While ensuring a genuine farm safety net, savings from greater fairness improvements need to be used for nutrition assistance to low-income people, conservation and rural development.

We will continue to work for fairness and justice in our food and farm policies as the Farm Bill moves to conference committee for final passage.

USCCB POSITION:

The U.S. Bishops have stated that "the primary goals of agricultural policies should be providing food for all people and reducing poverty among farmers and farmworkers in this country and abroad." (*For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food: Catholic Reflections on Food, Farmers and Farmworkers*). See letters on USCCB's 2007 Farm Bill priorities at: <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/national/agric.shtml>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

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