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March 28, 2012

The Honorable Herb Kohl
Chairman
Appropriations Subcommittee for Agriculture,
Rural Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee for Agriculture,
Rural Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman and Ranking Member:

As you consider the FY 2013 Agriculture Appropriations, we urge you to protect people living in poverty and hunger by preserving funding for Title II Food for Peace and McGovern-Dole Food for Education food assistance programs.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) bring three assets to this issue. First, the rich body of Catholic Social Teaching gives priority to our poorest brothers and sisters in allocating scarce resources. Second, our two institutions have deep and abiding relationships and partnerships with the Church in developing countries. The Church is a trusted institutional presence that enjoys extensive reach, including in remote communities. Third, for 68 years CRS has successfully implemented humanitarian and development programs in one hundred countries across the world, often in partnership with the U.S. government. This experience provides valuable insight into the implementation of food assistance programs.

The USCCB and CRS have identified Title II and McGovern-Dole as two programs that are critical to serving the poorest populations of the world. Through these programs, people impacted by drought or other natural disasters are fed, small farmers are given the tools they need to improve agricultural output, and the most vulnerable, including pregnant women and nursing children, are provided essential nutrition. In short, these programs save and improve the lives of millions of people.

The President's Budget Request increased the overall International Affairs Budget by 2.4%, but left unchanged funding for McGovern-Dole and cut Title II by 4.5% compared to last year's appropriation. We understand that Congress has difficult choices to make as it determines what level of support to provide these programs; however, we urge you to reduce future unsustainable deficits in morally responsible ways. Careless cuts to poverty-focused programs can cost lives, while thoughtful direction of funding can save them. This is why we support increased funding over last year's appropriated levels for both Title II and McGovern-Dole.

Letter to Chairman Kohl and Ranking Member Blunt

March 28, 2012

Page 2

USCCB and CRS also ask you to consider measures to preserve and improve the efficiency of Title II development programs. We recommend that you protect Title II funds to development programs by preserving the “safe box” provision. Programs funded through the safe box help chronically hungry communities build lasting agricultural capacity that minimizes the impact of bad weather and other catastrophes. Further, appropriated levels for Title II should be adequate to fully fund development programs while at the same time meeting emergency needs.

We support directing funds to the Local and Regional Purchase (LRP) of food commodities. As demonstrated in the pilot program funded by the 2008 Farm Bill, LRP can reduce the cost of food assistance, shorten delivery times, and improve overall response for both emergency and development programs. Lastly, we urge you to increase the amount of Title II 202(e) funding to better cover complementary programming costs and thus reduce the need for monetization.

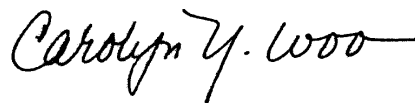
Our support for these programs and for the people living in poverty overseas works in tandem with our efforts to promote domestic nutrition and feeding programs in the Farm Bill that protect poor and hungry people living in the United States. We urge you to preserve funding for programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP).

USCCB and CRS are committed to delivering international food assistance in an effective and efficient manner, and look forward to discussing these requests with you in greater detail.

Sincerely yours,

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Most Reverend Richard E. Pates
Bishop of Des Moines
Chair, Committee on International Justice and Peace
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops



Dr. Carolyn Y. Woo
President
Catholic Relief Services