



CATHOLIC RURAL LIFE



Catholic
Charities
USA®



May 22, 2024

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Glenn “GT” Thompson
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Scott
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Boozman, Chairman Thompson, and Ranking Member Scott:

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic Relief Services, Catholic Charities USA, Catholic Rural Life, and the National Council of the U.S. Society of St. Vincent de Paul take this opportunity to respond to the Chairwoman’s mark of the “Rural Prosperity and Food Security Act” and the Chairman’s mark of the “Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2024”.

The Farm Bill is an extremely important piece of legislation for the Catholic community. In their pastoral letter, *For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food*, the U.S. bishops wrote, “Food sustains life itself; it is not just another product. Farming is a way of life, not just another business or industry. Agriculture is the way farmers, ranchers, and farmworkers provide a decent life for their families and help feed a hungry world. It is not just another economic activity.... It is about how we feed our own families, and the whole human family.” [We wrote to you one year ago](#) urging you **to ensure the upcoming Farm Bill prioritizes support for programs that feed the hungry both domestically and abroad, a safety net for farmers that ensures resources target small and moderate-sized family farms and vulnerable farmers, the well-being of rural communities, and sustainable stewardship of the land.** These priorities remain essential for a just Farm Bill. Please continue to work together to pursue these goals.

Domestic Hunger and Nutrition: Food is a basic need and a fundamental human right. Nothing should stand in the way of people having access to the food they need to live. We urge Congress to strengthen and protect programs that feed hungry individuals and families. As the nation’s largest anti-hunger program, SNAP is a critical component of the Farm Bill. **We are deeply concerned about a provision in the House bill that rescinds recent updates to the Thrifty Food Plan.** The Thrifty Food Plan must continue to be updated so it accurately reflects what it costs to feed a family with a healthy diet. Under the House proposal, the Thrifty Food Plan would be unable to reflect any new scientific nutrition evidence. It would act as a cut to future SNAP benefits for the millions of people who rely on the program for basic nutrition, estimated at over \$30 billion in the next decade. **We cannot support a Farm Bill that makes cuts to SNAP, including cuts to future benefit amounts, or that weakens the efficacy of or access to this vital program.**

We appreciate that both the House and Senate proposals make modest improvements to increase access to SNAP. We applaud both proposals for including a provision to eliminate the ban on SNAP benefits for people with drug-related felony convictions. These bans are punitive, prevent ex-offenders from fully reintegrating into society, and do nothing to advance public safety. Furthermore, we welcome the Senate proposal's establishment of a path for Puerto Rico to transition from a capped nutrition block grant to SNAP in the next ten years. The Senate's proposal also contains commendable provisions to improve SNAP access for military families and reimburse stolen EBT benefits. **We urge the House to adopt all these measures.**

We appreciate that both the House and Senate Farm Bill proposals make programmatic improvements in the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) and new investments in The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Incentive Program (SFMNP), and the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP). We welcome small steps in both the House and the Senate proposals to offer greater self-governance and food sovereignty for Tribal Nations and reiterate our support for Congress to do more to reach this goal.

International Food Security and Development: The support for international food assistance programs demonstrated in Chairwoman Stabenow's mark is appreciated. It continues the Food for Peace (FFP), McGovern-Dole Food for Education (FFE), Food for Progress, and the Farmer-to-Farmer programs that together help save lives in emergencies, improve the livelihoods of small farmers so they can feed their families, support school children in their studies, and leverage the expertise of American volunteers to support food security and nutrition outcomes for our brothers and sisters overseas. The proposal continues to provide food from the US to address global hunger, while making overall positive changes to international food assistance programs. Especially of note are changes to improve the implementation of Resilience Food Security Activities and to strengthen FFE programs to better support local farmers within the community or region, without taking away from the efforts towards nutrition, literacy, and education. We are uneasy about some changes being proposed, such as those made to USAID's waiver authority, but understand that compromises need to be made to reach consensus on the Farm Bill. As the Farm Bill legislative process continues, **we will work with all stakeholders to build consensus for policy changes in the international food assistance programs that make them more effective, efficient, and able to reach more people.**

While Chairman Thompson's Farm Bill mark also continues authorizations for the crucial international food assistance programs mentioned above, **we are extremely concerned by the proposed changes to the Food for Peace Title II program.** Chairman Thompson's package contains elements of the American Farmers Feed the World Act (H.R. 4293). Specifically, there is a new 50% cost limitation put on any expense that is not to procure US in-kind assistance or pay for ocean shipping. It also references a new consultation requirement between USAID and USDA as it relates to Food for Peace that risks slowing down emergency responses with bureaucratic impediments. While we support the important role that US commodities continue to play in international food assistance programs like Food for Peace Title II, we oppose H.R. 4293 because of its negative impacts and therefore oppose its inclusion in the Farm Bill. These proposed changes to Food for Peace Title II are putting program quality and reach at risk. We are also concerned by a new requirement for Ready to Use Therapeutic Food procurement since we do not support predetermining commodity amounts with spending directives and believe this will further constrain limited resources for other programs, including the Food for Peace Resilience Food Security Activities that have been essential to help communities recover from disaster and address chronic hunger and malnutrition while also decreasing the need for humanitarian responses in the future.

We support providing US commodities in the international food assistance programs, but we cannot focus solely on food distribution. We must ensure the programs respond to market conditions on the ground and that the communities can recover and provide for themselves and their families. We note the Chairman conveyed in his open letter that he does not want his changes to do harm. We share those concerns.

Conservation: The Catholic Church urges an integral ecology that recognizes a “certain reciprocity: as we care for creation, we realize that God, through creation, cares for us.”¹ Programs that focus on stewardship of working and retired lands and easements and partnerships deserve continued support. Funding designated for conservation must be protected, especially since conservation programs are largely oversubscribed and reduced conservation funding may further disadvantage small or moderate-sized farms, Black farmers, and other historically marginalized groups. We are pleased to see that both the Senate and House Farm Bill proposals offer support for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and Agriculture Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). However, **we are concerned that the House bill incorporates Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding for these programs while removing the IRA’s climate-smart requirements.** Instead, the Farm Bill should both support oversubscribed conservation programs *and* improve climate-smart programs to be more effective in agricultural decarbonization, which includes greater investment in technology innovation, research, and development. **We are also concerned about proposed changes in the House bill regarding the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the effect it will have on environmental and water quality issues.**

Subsidies: It is important to provide a suitable safety net for farmers through continued support for commodity and dairy farms as well as specialty crops. We urge Congress to target agricultural subsidies and direct payments to small and moderate-sized farms, especially those of Black farmers and other historically marginalized groups, and to enforce payment limits so those farmers who most need this safety net have access to it. **We are concerned about the large increase in commodity supports in the House bill at the expense of future SNAP benefits.** A more targeted approach to commodity supports could help ensure the legitimate needs of farmers are not pitted against families struggling to put food on the table.

Rural Development: Rural communities need effective policies and programs to support their development and well-being. We are grateful for efforts in both the Senate and House proposals to strengthen rural health care and mental health supports, expand broadband connectivity, and invest in water and wastewater infrastructure. We appreciate the proposals’ modest efforts to support young and underserved farmers and encourage Congress to build on this work through additional scholarships, mentorship, training, and support programs, and measures to improve access to land. More needs to be done to integrate climate change mitigation and adaptation into rural development policies.

Now is a critical time to hear both the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth, to consider the needs of the hungry, of underserved farmers, and of rural communities. We look forward to working with you as you shape the next Farm Bill.

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace (Jan 1, 2010). https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliiii-world-day-peace.html

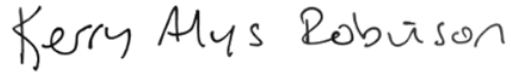
Sincerely yours,



Most Reverend Borys Gudziak
Archbishop of Ukrainian Catholic
Archeparchy of Philadelphia
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops



Most Reverend A. Elias Zaidan
Bishop of Maronite Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops



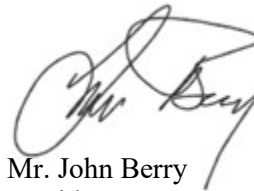
Ms. Kerry Alys Robinson
President and CEO
Catholic Charities USA



Mr. Sean Callahan
President and CEO
Catholic Relief Services



Mr. James Ennis
Executive Director
Catholic Rural Life



Mr. John Berry
President
National Council of the United States Society of
St. Vincent de Paul