



Action Alert!

Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 3211 4th St., NE, Washington, DC 20017

FARM BILL ACTION ALERT

April 11, 2008

Act Now

Please contact your Representative and Senators (for contact information go to www.house.gov and www.senate.gov), and let them know that there is still time for important reform. The food and farm policies of the United States must reflect our values of a just society that cares about the future of rural communities and about our brothers and sisters abroad whose basic subsistence depends on farming. Urge him or her to:

- **Support the new Dorgan-Grassley payment limits compromise** which targets farm supports to active farmers and caps direct payments as market prices for commodities rise. *The savings generated from such targeting of our farm supports would support such priorities as needed improvements in nutrition, conservation and rural development. By reducing costs, the proposal may help break the current budget impasse about funding levels.*
- **Support the House-passed funding level of \$11.5 billion in new ten-year nutrition funding** to make needed investments in the Food Stamp Program and for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), and to maintain the flexibility in the Food Stamp Program to allow local charitable organizations to do outreach to increase participation in this vital program. *The new ten-year investment would allow the Food Stamp Program's standard deduction and minimum benefit to be indexed for inflation and the cap on dependent care to be lifted so that more families who are poor and working can have access to adequate food assistance.*
- **Support food security aid provisions** that (1) establish a "safebox" in the Senate-passed version of the trade section that sets aside without a waiver \$600 million of PL 480 Title II resources for development to aid those suffering from chronic hunger), (2) allow needed flexibility in using cash or commodities in fighting hunger abroad, and (3) mandate a \$25 million pilot program for the purchase of food locally or regionally from resident farmers.

Background

Both the House and Senate versions of the Farm bill include critical investments in nutrition, international food aid and conservation initiatives that the Catholic community strongly supports. However, neither version has resulted in meaningful reform of farm supports so that small and moderate-sized family farmers and ranchers can better benefit from farm programs and farmers in developing countries are not harmed by trade distorting subsidies.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), the National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC), Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA), and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) continue to work closely together to support policies in the 2007 Farm bill that support rural communities and family farms; strengthen and expand domestic anti-hunger programs; promote conservation and good stewardship of the land; ensure safe living and working conditions for farmworkers; promote fairness for farmers in developing countries; and provide food security aid efficiently and effectively to hungry people worldwide.

The Catholic community has a strong unified voice in support of both domestic and international nutrition programs: the Food Stamp Program; The Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP); and improvements in food aid provisions. Given the rise in food prices, strong funding levels to address hunger both domestically and internationally is more important today than ever.

Pressing for Reform

Under the current Farm bill, the top ten percent of farm payment recipients receive about 70 percent of the overall benefits of our farm supports. Such a system puts smaller-scale farm and ranch operations here in the United States at a disadvantage and distorts the local and global marketplace, especially to the detriment of poor farmers in developing countries.

The current versions of the Farm bill do not address the concentration of farm payments to the wealthiest or the repercussions of such policy. True reform will spread the benefits of payments in farm programs more equitably to family farmers actively engaged in farming.

Senators Dorgan (D-ND) and Grassley (R-IA) have proposed a 4-point compromise to tighten payment limitations as market prices for particular commodities rise and by targeting payments to those "actively engaged" in farming. The new payment limits compromise would generate \$2 billion in savings over ten years to be reinvested in nutrition, conservation and rural development programs.

USCCB POSITION:

The Catholic bishops of the United States 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](#)).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

To read Catholic community joint letters and action alerts, go to:
<http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/national/agric.shtml>

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