



July 18, 2017

The Honorable John Hoeven, Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food
and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley, Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food
and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Hoeven and Ranking Member Merkley:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committees on Domestic Justice and Human Development and International Justice and Peace, Catholic Charities USA, Catholic Relief Services and Catholic Rural Life, we wish to address the moral and human dimensions of FY 2018 Agriculture Appropriations. The nation's priorities must include robust funding for both domestic and international food aid, conservation and rural development programs, and resist harmful cuts. Many of these program areas have already been subject to reductions over time. Further cuts would be detrimental to vulnerable people and communities.

In *For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food*, the U.S. bishops wrote, "The primary goals of agricultural policies should be providing food for all people and reducing poverty among farmers and farm workers in this country and abroad." Adequate nutrition is essential to protect human life and dignity. We must also promote good stewardship of the land and natural resources. In our soup kitchens and parish food pantries, we see the faces of poor and hungry people every day both domestically and internationally. As a faith community, we feed those without work, pregnant women and children, and seniors on limited incomes across the globe. With more than over 42 million (1 in 7) living in food insecure households in the U.S. alone, our nation must prioritize programs that assist poor and hungry people and promote good stewardship.

In addition to refraining from making cuts that impact programs like SNAP, which provide greater levels of food security to millions of people, it is vital to provide robust funding for the following domestic programs:

Women, Infants, and Children (WIC): Fully fund the WIC nutrition program to ensure that all qualified families receive vital nutritional support, investments are made in technology to improve program operations, and sufficient reserves are built to prepare for economic volatility.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP): Provide **full funding levels as required by the 2014 Farm Bill** for TEFAP and food distribution grants in local communities. which allow for significant funding increases in FY18. TEFAP is the backbone of the charitable food system, providing roughly 20% of food distributed by local hunger-relief organizations in 2017.

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP): Increase funding for CACFP which provides nutritious meals and snacks to over 4 million adults and children contributing to the wellness and healthy development of vulnerable Americans.

Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP): Fully fund the CSFP to ensure adequate food assistance is provided to the growing population of low-income seniors. Faith communities and other charities are essential in providing food packages to hungry seniors in their local communities and, as the population continues to age, our ministries are experiencing increasing demand for food services from seniors that must be addressed.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP): Provide adequate funding for CSP to help farmers better conserve and care for farm land for future generations. Strong conservation programs are necessary to promote good stewardship of creation and provide needed support to family farms.

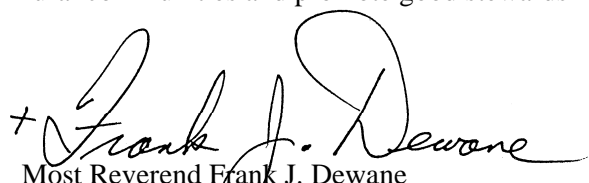
Value Added Producer Grants (VAPG): Maintain current funding for the VAPG program to help farmers and ranchers develop new farm and food-related businesses to increase rural economic opportunity and help farm and ranch families thrive.

We also ask you to prioritize international food security programs. Administration has proposed cutting all funding for the Food for Peace and McGovern-Dole Food for Education programs. We strongly oppose this decision and ask that Congress maintain their support for these programs.


International Food Assistance: The Administration's proposed cuts come at a time of unprecedented food emergencies, including pending famine in East Africa, the Lake Chad Basin, and Yemen. Millions of people are alive today, and are leading more productive lives, because of these programs. Cutting funding for these programs puts their lives at risk, undermines progress towards reducing extreme poverty, harms U.S. interests, and may lead to a more unstable world. Given the level of need, particularly in emergency food assistance, we ask Congress to fund Food for Peace at \$1.716 billion in FY 2018, the same level that was provided the program in FY2016. We also ask Congress to maintain funding in FY2018 for the McGovern-Dole program at its current level of \$201.6 million.


Food for Peace development programs, also referred to as "non-emergency programs", build resilience, strengthen agricultural capacity, and improve livelihoods for the most vulnerable, reducing the need to provide future emergency assistance. Pursuant to the 2014 Farm Bill, a minimum of \$350 million of Food for Peace resources must be used in development programs. We ask that you support this funding level for development programming in the FY2018 appropriations. Further, we ask that you provide USAID the authority to use Development Assistance funds in the implementation of Food for Peace development programs, and that you allow funds used in this way to count towards the \$350 million minimum funding level for non-emergency programs.


At a time of continuing budgetary constraints and competition for agricultural resources, the needs of those who are hungry, poor and vulnerable should come before assistance to those who are relatively well off. With other Christian leaders, we urge the committee to draw a "circle of protection" around programs that serve those in greatest need and to prioritize their needs first. We urge you to protect and fund programs that feed hungry people, help the most vulnerable farmers, strengthen rural communities and promote good stewardship of God's creation.



+ Frank J. Dewane
Most Reverend Frank J. Dewane
Bishop of Venice
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development

Sincerely yours,


+ Oscar Cantú
Most Reverend Oscar Cantú
Bishop of Las Cruces
Chairman, Committee on International Justice
and Peace


Sr. Donna Markham, OP, Ph.D.
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