



CATHOLIC RURAL LIFE



February 5, 2018

The Honorable Pat Roberts, Chairman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

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

Dear Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow:

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic Relief Services, Catholic Charities USA, Catholic Rural Life, and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul take this opportunity to highlight priorities for U.S. food and agriculture policy as you consider the 2018 Farm Bill. American policies should provide for poor and hungry people here and abroad, offer effective support for those who grow our food, ensure fairness to family farmers and ranchers while building up rural communities, and promote good stewardship of the land.

In his 2016 address to the UN World Food Programme, Pope Francis delivered a frank assessment of the state of hunger in the world today:

Let us be clear. Food shortage is not something natural, it is not a given, something obvious or self-evident. . . The earth, abused and exploited, continues in many parts of the world to yield its fruits, offering us the best of itself. The faces of the starving remind us that we have foiled its purposes.

Congress is called to remember the “faces of the starving” as it considers our nation’s priorities for those suffering from hunger here and around the world. Remembering farmers is vital as well, those whose labors help the earth “to yield its fruits” for the benefit of us all.

As you deliberate on the 2018 Farm Bill, the following should be prioritized:

- **Domestic Hunger and Nutrition:** Food is a basic need and a fundamental human right. Therefore, food production ought to be a critical national concern. Most people hope that economic recovery will eventually help those struggling with food insecurity. However, when faced with tens of millions still unsure about how they will put food on the table, robust funding of programs that feed hungry families must be prioritized.

The **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**, the **Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)**, the **Commodity Supplemental Food program (CSFP)** and other similar initiatives are critical to meeting the needs of hungry people. SNAP not only helped feed more than 43 million people last year but also lifted over 4 million Americans above the poverty line. It is responsive to increased periods of need and continues to have one of the lowest fraud rates for federal programs. Congress should oppose efforts to weaken efficiency or access to this important part of the social safety net, and instead strengthen SNAP by improving outreach, streamlining enrollment, and including case management in efforts to align state employment and training activities to improve access to living-wage jobs.

At the same time, the Farm Bill should ensure support for the successful public-private partnership that the TEFAP program provides by ensuring access to short-term food assistance through food banks, soup kitchens and emergency shelters. Congress should strengthen the TEFAP program by authorizing mandatory funding for the program of \$350 million and maintaining storage and distribution funds at \$100 million per year. Finally, we urge you to reauthorize the CSFP program, which provides food to almost 700,000 low-income seniors each year.

- **International Food Security and Development:** The international food security programs authorized in the Farm Bill, including Food for Peace, McGovern-Dole Food for Education, Food for Progress, USDA LRP, and Farmer-to-Farmer, provide life-saving emergency assistance, as well as support vital development programs for vulnerable groups. Congress has shown strong bi-partisan support for these programs, and current authorized funding levels for them should be maintained, particularly the \$350M within Food for Peace that supports USAID’s long-term Development Food Security Assistance projects that are essential in the fight against extreme poverty. Further, in order to boost efficiency, reach, and effectiveness of these programs, Congress should authorize the Community Development Fund, remove the requirement to monetize

in Food for Peace, make permanent local and regional procurement in McGovern-Dole, boost funding for overseas transportation of commodities in Food for Progress, and address the burden of cargo preference in all food aid programs.


- **Subsidies:** The Commodity Title was established to provide a safety net for farmers and it is important to continue a reasonable amount of support for our commodity and dairy farmers. Protecting against cuts to the USDA that would impact its ability to place staff in rural communities to help farmers diversify crops, get access to new markets, and receive assistance on technical issues is imperative. Given federal budget constraints, agricultural subsidies and direct payments can be better targeted to small and moderate-sized farms, especially those that are minority owned. Government resources should assist those who truly need assistance and support those who comply with environmentally sound and sustainable farming practices.
- **Conservation:** The Catholic Church urges an integral ecology which recognizes a “certain reciprocity: as we care for creation, we realize that God, through creation, cares for us.” Programs that focus on good stewardship, such as the **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)**, the **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)**, the **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)** and **Agriculture Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)**, should receive special attention. Congress should give attention to the well-documented problem of wasted food and its deleterious effects on the hungry and the environment as well.
- **Rural Development:** Rural communities and small towns are the backbone of the social and economic life of America. Yet, their viability is jeopardized by slow economic improvement, aging infrastructure, the opioid epidemic, under-employment, and the movement of younger generations to other communities. Effective policies and programs are needed to encourage rural development and promote the culture and well-being of rural America. Young farmers and their families should be supported and encouraged to fortify the profession and strengthen the national food supply. Crucial rural infrastructure investments, as well as innovative programs not funded in the permanent Farm Bill baseline deserve to be emphasized. These programs include: the **Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP)**, the **Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant Program**, the **Rural Business Investment Program**, the **Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI)**, and the **Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program**, among others.

This is a crucial time for our nation to put poor and hungry people first, support small and moderate-sized family farms, promote sustainable stewardship of the land, and help vulnerable farmers and rural communities both at home and in developing countries. We look forward to working with you as you shape the 2018 Farm Bill.

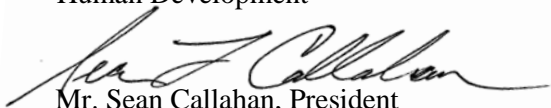
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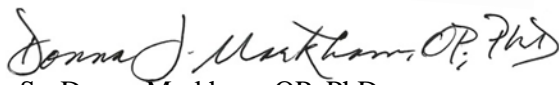
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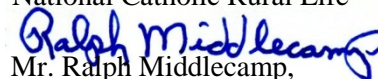
Mr. Sean Callahan, President
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Sr. Donna Markham, OP, PhD,
President and CEO
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Mr. James Ennis, Executive Director
National Catholic Rural Life



Mr. Ralph Middlecamp,
President, National Council of the United
States Society of St. Vincent de Paul



CATHOLIC RURAL LIFE



February 5, 2018

The Honorable Michael K. Conaway, Chairman
Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Collin C. Peterson, Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Conaway and Ranking Member Peterson:

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic Relief Services, Catholic Charities USA, Catholic Rural Life, and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul take this opportunity to highlight priorities for U.S. food and agriculture policy as you consider the 2018 Farm Bill. American policies should provide for poor and hungry people here and abroad, offer effective support for those who grow our food, ensure fairness to family farmers and ranchers while building up rural communities, and promote good stewardship of the land.

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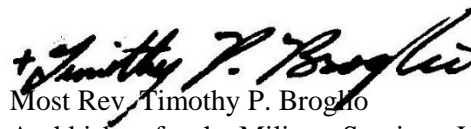
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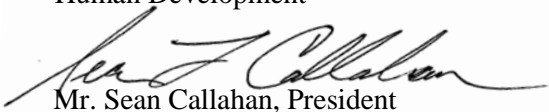
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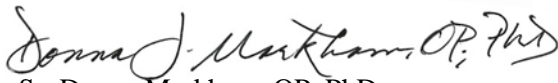
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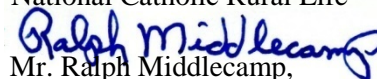
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