



August 30, 2018

United States Congress
2018 Farm Bill Conference Committee Members
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Farm Bill Conference Committee Member:

As you work to finalize the 2018 Farm Bill, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, joined by Catholic Relief Services, Catholic Charities USA, Catholic Rural Life, and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, request that you negotiate a final bill that reflects a commitment to the common good of all. Agriculture policies should adequately respond to the needs of the most vulnerable and hungry people, and farmers and families at home and abroad.

As you deliberate in conference committee on the Farm Bill, we ask you to support the following priorities:

Domestic Hunger and Nutrition: Food is a basic need and a fundamental human right. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) not only help respond to people in need but also contribute to supporting local farm economies. We therefore call upon you to:

- Support the Senate bill's provisions to maintain and strengthen portions of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Efforts to provide people a wider array of SNAP training programs for employment are welcome, particularly those in rural communities with limited options. Expanding the 2014 Farm Bill Employment and Training (E&T) Pilot Program, to allow additional states to create evidence-based approaches to reaching underserved populations, is encouraging for the millions of people we serve. Additionally, providing language that pilot projects contain individualized case management is critical to demonstrating how "wrap around" services can assist with removing barriers to employment. Local input on workforce training programs and use of case-management are vital to building programs tailored to the needs of individuals and their communities.
- Oppose the House bill's changes to categorical eligibility, enhanced excessive work requirements, imposition of underfunded job training requirements and the denial of benefits to persons who have already served their time for certain crimes.
- Support the House bill's proposals to update asset tests and savings allowances so that individuals are supported in their efforts to gain greater economic security for their family.
- We were pleased to see that both chambers' bills reauthorized the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), critical to supplementing low-income senior's food security. Both bills also made commendable investments in the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP).

International Food Security and Development: The support for international food assistance programs demonstrated in both the House and Senate Farm Bills is appreciated. Both bills continue the Food for Peace, McGovern-Dole, Food for Progress, and the Farmer-to-Farmer programs at current authorized funding levels, including continued support of \$350 million for Food for Peace development programs. Together, these programs help in reducing famine, improve the livelihoods of small farmers so they can feed their families, help school children excel in their studies, and leverage the expertise of American volunteers to support food security outcomes for our poorest brothers and sisters overseas.

The positive changes to international food assistance programs are acknowledged and supported. Both bills remove the monetization requirement in Food for Peace and allow Community Development Funds to be paired with Food for Peace development activities. The Senate Farm Bill goes further by making permanent, local purchase in McGovern-Dole programs and replacing some monetization in Food for Progress programs with direct program funding. These changes will make programs more effective and allow them to reach a greater number of people. As the Conference Committee works on finalizing the Farm Bill, the adoption of all these improvements to international food security programs is encouraged.

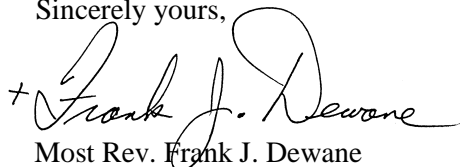
Rural Development: Rural communities are a treasure of our nation's economic and cultural landscape and several key federal programs help address the many challenges rural communities face. It is asked that the Conference Committee include the Senate provision that creates the Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP) and provides \$60 million in permanent funding to this program to support local food systems and provide grants to rural businesses. Similarly, the creation of the Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach Program will help socially disadvantaged persons, veterans, and new farmers in fulfilling their agricultural vocations, so permanent funding for this program is encouraged. The Rural Energy for America Program should also continue to receive mandatory funding, as it promotes rural renewable energy production and energy efficiency projects. Expanded broadband access should also be supported to help rural economies grow.

Conservation: Farmers and ranchers, like everyone, are called to use natural resources responsibly for ourselves and future generations. The conservation title promotes agricultural well-being by helping ensure the health of land and water resources. We encourage The Conference Committee is encouraged to preserve working lands programs, particularly the Conservation Stewardship Program, which incorporates a comprehensive approach to conservation that aligns with Pope Francis' ethic of integral ecology. Provisions that increase coordination between these programs should be included in the final bill. The inclusion of key modifications to the Conservation Reserve Program that prioritize enrolling the most environmentally-sensitive lands is also requested. Support is given to the proposed increases in funding of the Agriculture Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) and encourage the conference committee to reject provisions that would allow mineral development on lands intended to be preserved through ACEP.

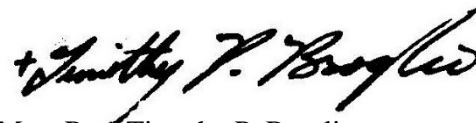
Subsidies: Farmers and ranchers deserve assistance in times of need. However, farm supports should be prioritized for farmers and ranchers who struggle to compete and thrive. The final Farm Bill should include the Senate bill's language, which limits subsidy payments to farmers actively engaged in farming.

Congress and the Administration face serious challenges in how best to craft our nation's agriculture policies. The Farm Bill provides an opportunity for our country to demonstrate its solidarity with poor and hungry people at home and around the world, offer support to struggling family farmers and ranchers, encourage sustainable stewardship of the land, and help vulnerable rural communities. In finalizing the Farm Bill, we call upon you to craft a final agreement that lifts-up human dignity and serves the common good of all.

Sincerely yours,



Most Rev. Frank J. Dewane
Bishop of Venice
Chair, Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development



Most Rev. Timothy P. Broglio
Archbishop for the Military Services, USA
Chair, Committee on International Justice
and Peace



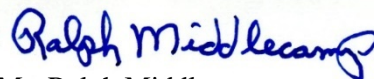
Mr. Sean Callahan
President
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Sr. Donna Markham, OP, PhD
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Mr. James Ennis
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Mr. Ralph Middlecamp
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