



June 08, 2023

The Honorable Martin Heinrich, Chair
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development
Food / Drug Administration, and Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

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

Dear Chair Heinrich and Ranking Member Hoeven:

We write on behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development and Committee on International Justice and Peace, joined by Catholic Charities USA, Catholic Relief Services, and Catholic Rural Life. The respective Catholic organizations we represent work with Congress each year on a range of our priorities, including supporting the poor and vulnerable, protecting migrants and refugees, and protecting the unborn. Here, we wish to address the moral and human dimensions of the FY 2024 Agriculture Appropriations legislation.

The cost of food has increased significantly due to inflation. This puts particular stress on the poorest families to get enough to eat and be healthy. In the words of Pope Francis, "Hunger is criminal, food is an inalienable right."¹ In this environment, nutrition programs that support the basic right to food should be strengthened. We must work to ensure every person has enough nutritious food to sustain a life with dignity, promote good stewardship of the land and natural resources, and provide support to struggling farmers, ranchers, and farm workers.

To help families and service providers cope with rising costs, please increase funding for the vital programs listed below. At a minimum, we urge you to maintain FY 2023 funding levels for these programs.

- **The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)** helped feed more than 41 million Americans in 2022 and lifted nearly 3 million out of poverty. It is responsive to increased and decreased periods of need and continues to have one of the lowest fraud rates for federal programs. SNAP should be strengthened through updates to calculations that account for rising food prices, improvement to the standard medical deduction, eliminating the cap on the Excess Shelter Deduction, and increased benefits for households with young children. Additional funding is requested for SNAP Employment and Training as well as SNAP Education. All U.S. territories should participate in SNAP and be brought into parity with the states. State flexibility around waiving or scaling back work requirements should be preserved given present and future economic uncertainties. Access should also be improved for students, military families, lawfully present immigrants and refugees, and seniors. Formerly incarcerated individuals should be able to access SNAP. We ask you to provide funding to increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables through programs such as the **Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Incentive Program, the Gus**

¹ Pope Francis, Address to the Participants in the World Meeting of Popular Movements (Oct 28, 2014). https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/october/documents/papa-francesco_20141028_incontro-mondiale-movimenti-popolari.html

Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP), and through infrastructure support to food banks for refrigeration and distribution of fresh produce.

- **The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP):** The TEFAP program is the backstop for food security in communities across the country, providing roughly 20% of food distributed by local hunger-relief organizations. It should be strengthened through additional mandatory funding, allowing the Department of Agriculture to retain the authority to purchase bonus commodities in times of high need and low prices, increasing support for the **Farm to Food Bank program** without the state match requirement, and supporting policies to make food donation easier. The **CSFP should maintain full funding** to help 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 are critical partners in the TEFAP program.
- **Women, Infants, and Children (WIC):** Fully fund the WIC nutrition program ensuring that all families in need have access to life-saving nutritional and health services. Provide investments to further extend the benefit for fruits and vegetables and to ensure program operations can respond adequately to changes in the economy and rising caseloads and food costs.
- **Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP):** For over 50 years, CACFP has supplemented the diets of vulnerable Americans by providing nutritious meals and snacks. It is imperative to increase funding for CACFP to continue supporting the health and wellness of the over 4 million Americans served by this program.
- **Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP):** Maintain 2018 Farm Bill mandatory funding adjusted to inflation for LAMP to expand access to local fresh and nutritious food. LAMP also helps underserved farmers and ranchers start new farm and food-related businesses to increase rural economic opportunity and help rural communities thrive.
- **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.”² Programs that focus on stewardship of working and retired lands and easements and partnerships, such as the **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)**, **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)**, **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)**, and **Agriculture Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)**, should receive special attention. We urge Congress to provide adequate funding for the **Conservation Stewardship Program** to help underserved farmers and ranchers better conserve and care for farmland for future generations. Strong conservation programs are essential to enhancing natural resources and environmental protection and provide needed support to family farms. Conservation programs should include solutions to address carbon capture, climate mitigation, adaptation, food waste and ensuring access for all these programs to applicants who experienced historic disparities and discrimination, especially Black farmers.
- **Subsidies:** It is important to continue support for **commodity and dairy farms**, as well as **specialty crops**, to encourage diversified production. 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 must be targeted to **small and moderate-sized farms**, especially those of Black farmers and other historically marginalized groups, and payment limits must be enforced.

² 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

- **International Food Assistance and Development:** International food assistance programs continue to provide much-needed resources in both emergency and development settings for people impacted by severe and chronic hunger. Rising hunger related needs are the consequence of compounding drivers, such as conflict and climate change, that pose grave threats to global food security. The war in Ukraine is reducing the purchasing power of organizations programming humanitarian assistance due to global supply chain shortages that have inflated the price of staple commodities.
- **McGovern-Dole International Food for Education Program:** We also recognize the achievements of the McGovern-Dole program – now in its 21st year– in successfully improving maternal and child nutrition outcomes, promoting childhood literacy, supporting local farmers and markets, and helping transition at-risk schools to a sustainable homegrown school feeding model. Additionally, Catholic Relief Services welcomes the integration of local and regional procurement interventions into programs across the board to support sustainability efforts that ensure long-term success even when the program ceases to receive U.S. government investments. We ask Congress to allocate \$265 million for the McGovern-Dole program.
- **Food for Peace Title II:** Food for Peace Title II continues to serve as a critical lifeline for communities – like in Ethiopia and Southern Madagascar – encountering the most severe forms of food insecurity. It also provides holistic, multisectoral support during the late stages of recovery to address the root causes of hunger and help communities graduate out of poverty through non-emergency Title II funding. These programs, known as Resilience Food Security Activities (RFSAs), are designed to build resilience, strengthen agricultural capacity, and transform livelihoods for the most vulnerable households. They also reduce the need for future humanitarian assistance. Additionally, Food for Peace non-emergency funding supports the Farmer-to-Farmer program, matching U.S. farming volunteers and agriculture experts with development programs overseas. Taking into consideration increasing global needs, we ask that you support no less than \$2 billion for Food for Peace Title II in the FY 2024 appropriations with clear direction that at least \$350 million be used for RFSAs and \$15 million for Farmer-to-Farmer.
- **Rural Housing:** Support rural residents by preserving affordable rural rental housing through adequate funding for Section 514 and 515 programs and the Multifamily Preservation and Revitalization Demonstration. Ensure that sufficient rental assistance and rural housing vouchers are available to keep these units affordable to rural workers and families.

A just framework for future budgets cannot rely on disproportionate cuts in essential services to poor and other vulnerable persons. It requires shared sacrifice by all, including raising adequate revenues, eliminating unnecessary spending, and addressing the long-term costs of health insurance and retirement programs fairly.³

Finally, any work that aims at ensuring justice and the means of flourishing for every human being cannot be separated from the protection and wellbeing of women and preborn children. To that end, we strongly encourage Congress, in the appropriations process, to protect the dignity and sanctity of human life in all conditions and stages. We especially urge Congress to prevent and prohibit policies that facilitate and promote access to chemical abortion through the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Mothers in need and their families deserve authentic support.

³ USCCB, CCUSA, and CRS Letter to Congress on the Debt limit, May 17, 2023.
<https://www.usccb.org/resources/usccb-ccusa-and-crs-letter-congress-debt-limit-may-17-2023>

Thank you for your consideration and efforts to protect and fund programs that support families, feed hungry people, help the most vulnerable farmers and farmworkers, strengthen rural communities, and promote good stewardship of God's creation. We look forward to working with you as budgetary appropriations are shaped.

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 David J. Malloy
Bishop of Rockford
Chairman, Committee on International Justice
and Peace
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops



Mr. Anthony J. Granado
Vice President of
Government Relations
Catholic Charities USA



Mr. Sean Callahan
President and CEO
Catholic Relief Services



Mr. James Ennis
Executive Director
Catholic Rural Life