



CATHOLIC RURAL LIFE



July 30, 2025

Dear Senator/Representative:

We write on behalf of Catholic organizations that provide support to the poor and vulnerable, assist migrants and refugees, and protect the preborn. Today we address the moral and human dimensions of the FY2026 Agriculture Appropriations legislation.

Food insecurity is on the rise globally, and the United States is not an exception. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), 13.5 percent (18 million) of U.S. households experienced food insecurity at some point during 2023. The 2023 prevalence of food insecurity was statistically higher than the 12.8 percent (17 million households) in 2022.<sup>1</sup> While the inflation of grocery prices has leveled off significantly since 2022, the USDA predicts prices will continue to rise by around 2.2 percent in 2025.<sup>2</sup>

It is hard to make ends meet for many, and families need help. Pope Leo XIV recently emphasized the importance of eradicating hunger by recounting the miracle of the multiplication of loaves and fishes: “The Church encourages all initiatives to put an end to the outrage of hunger in the world, making her own the sentiments of her Lord, Jesus, who, as the Gospels narrate, when he saw a great multitude coming to him to hear his word, was concerned first of all to feed them....”<sup>3</sup> 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 farmworkers.

We urge Congress to increase funding for the critical programs listed below. At a minimum, we urge maintaining FY2025 funding levels for these programs and ensuring the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is fully funded, as the bill reported out of the Senate Appropriations Committee has done. The devastating cuts and structural changes made to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) through the budget reconciliation process, along with administrative actions impacting international food aid, food banks, school meals, and conservation efforts, have made the need to ensure adequate funding for vital USDA programs more important than ever. Please utilize your legislative authority to safeguard programs that Congress has authorized and funded in the past from harmful administrative actions and protect against further cuts that harm those who are hungry and the farmers who feed them.

**Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC):** Vulnerable moms, infants, and young children receive healthy food and nutrition support through WIC. This support is vital and must be maintained for all families in need. We are grateful for Congress’s efforts to ensure full funding of the WIC nutrition program in FY2025 in light of rising food costs and

<sup>1</sup> Rabbitt, M.P., Reed-Jones, M., Hales, L.J., & Burke, M.P., , U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Economic Research Service, [Household Food Security in the United States in 2023 House](#) (September 2024).

<sup>2</sup> USDA, Economic Research Service, [Food Price Outlook Summary Findings](#) (June 25, 2025).

<sup>3</sup> Pope Leo XIV, [Message to Participants in the 44<sup>th</sup> Session of the FAO Conference](#) (June 30, 2025).

increased program participation. Again, we implore Congress to fully fund WIC at no less than the same level of FY2025 (factoring inflation and WIC's growing caseload) so that all eligible families who apply for WIC will receive access to life-saving nutrition and health services. The recent science-based updates to the WIC food program, including an increased fruit and vegetable benefit, will help families receive proper nutrition and introduce nutrient-dense foods to their diet. Please protect these improvements and continue Congress's long history of bipartisan support for WIC.

**The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP):** Nearly 42 million Americans relied on SNAP for basic nutrition in 2024 and the program lifted 3.4 million people out of poverty the year before.<sup>4</sup> SNAP is responsive to periods of increased and decreased need, and fraud in the program is rare.<sup>5</sup> Despite our disappointment with the cuts made by Congress from the recent reconciliation bill, we continue to ask Congress to ensure adequate funds for SNAP, provide additional funding for state employment and training programs and reinstate SNAP-Education funding, including case management, to help low-income families find work and self-sufficiency. SNAP should be strengthened through updates to calculations that account for rising food prices, improvements to the standard medical deduction, elimination of the cap on the Excess Shelter Deduction, and increased benefits for households with young children. State flexibility around waiving or scaling back work requirements should be restored, 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. All U.S. territories should participate in SNAP and be brought into parity with the states.

**The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP):** The TEFAP program is the backstop for food security in communities across the country, providing roughly 20 percent of food distributed by local hunger-relief organizations. We urge Congress to strengthen the program through additional 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, investing in infrastructure for refrigeration and distribution of fresh produce, and supporting policies to make food donation easier.

**Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP):** Faith communities and other charities are essential in providing food packages to hungry seniors in their local communities. Please maintain full funding for CSFP to help ensure adequate food assistance is provided to the growing population of low-income seniors.

**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. We ask Congress to increase funding for CACFP to continue supporting the health and wellness of the over 4 million Americans served by this program.

**Access to Nutritious Food:** More communities have access to locally grown food thanks to the **Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP)**. The program also helps underserved farmers and ranchers start new farm and food-related businesses to increase rural economic opportunity and help rural communities thrive. Please maintain 2018 Farm Bill mandatory funding adjusted to inflation for LAMP to expand access to local fresh and nutritious food. We also ask Congress to provide funding

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<sup>4</sup> Emily Shreider, U.S. Census Bureau, [Poverty in the United States: 2023](#) (September 2024).

<sup>5</sup> Congressional Research Service, [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Errors and Fraud](#) (April 7, 2025).

to increase access to fresh produce through programs such as the **Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Incentive Programs** and the **Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP)**.

**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.”<sup>6</sup> 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 reduce food waste, help farmers, the land, and surrounding wildlife habitats cope with increasingly unpredictable weather, capture carbon, and ensure program access to applicants who experience historic disparities and discrimination, especially Black farmers. The **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)**, **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)**, **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)**, and **Agriculture Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)** are cornerstone programs focused on stewardship of working and retired lands, easements, and partnerships. We are pleased that the recent reconciliation bill reauthorizes these programs until 2031 and increases funding above 2018 Farm Bill levels. However, IRA conservation funding recissions remove targeted funding for popular practices that help farmers prepare and cope with increasingly unpredictable and disruptive weather events.

**Subsidies:** It is important to continue support for **commodity and dairy farms**, as well as **specialty crops**, to encourage diversified production. We advocate 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. 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.

**International Food Assistance and Development:** U.S. funding for international food assistance programs saves lives, reduces extreme poverty, and supports U.S. interests. 783 million people were estimated to be hungry globally in 2023. The 2025 Global Report on Food Crises reported that nearly 294 million people experienced high levels of acute hunger over the last year. Hunger crises are raging around the world from Gaza to Sudan to Haiti and beyond. Given the projected needs, we ask Congress to provide the highest funding levels possible to Food for Peace Title II and the McGovern-Dole Food for Education Program:

- **Food for Peace Title II:** Food for Peace is authorized by the Farm Bill and provides food from the United States to hungry people around the world. Food for Peace emergency programs serve as a critical lifeline for communities and the complementary development programs, called Resilience Food Security Activities, provide holistic support during the late stages of recovery to address the root causes of hunger and help communities move out of poverty by laying the groundwork to establish conditions that promote a “trade not aid” relationship with the United States. 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. Recognizing the Senate funding level for FY2026 is currently higher than that in the House, we ask that Congress support no less than \$1.5 billion for Food for Peace Title II in the FY2026 appropriations with clear direction that at least \$365 million be used for nonemergency programs, including \$350 million for Resilience Food Securities Activities and \$15 million for Farmer-to-Farmer.

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<sup>6</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, [Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace](#) (Jan 1, 2010).

- ***McGovern-Dole International Food for Education Program:*** Catholic Relief Services has partnered with USDA in implementing McGovern-Dole projects for over two decades, providing school aged children with a daily school meal and supporting their education, in part by using food grown by U.S. farmers. In our work we have seen this program improve maternal and child nutrition outcomes, promote childhood literacy, support local farmers and markets, and help transition at-risk schools to a sustainable homegrown school feeding model. Recognizing the Senate funding level for FY2026 is currently higher than that in the House, we ask that Congress support no less than \$240 million for the McGovern-Dole program.

**Rural Housing:** USDA's rural housing programs help support rural residents and agricultural workers. We ask Congress to preserve affordable rural rental housing through adequate funding for **Section 514 and 515 programs** and the **Multifamily Preservation and Revitalization Demonstration**. Please ensure that sufficient **rental assistance** and **rural housing vouchers** are available to keep these units affordable to rural workers and families.

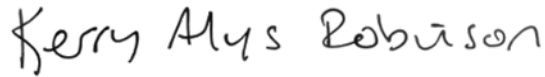
Finally, any work that aims at ensuring justice and the means of flourishing for every human being cannot be separated from the protection and well-being of women and unborn children. To that end, we strongly encourage Congress, including in the agriculture appropriations process, to protect the dignity and sanctity of human life in all conditions and stages. We especially urge Congress to counteract 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.

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.

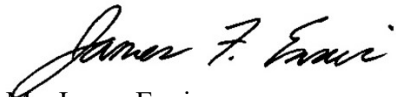
Sincerely yours,



Most Reverend Borys Gudziak  
Archbishop of Ukrainian Catholic  
Archeparchy of Philadelphia  
Chair, Committee on Domestic Justice  
and Human Development  
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops



Kerry Alys Robinson  
President and CEO  
Catholic Charities USA



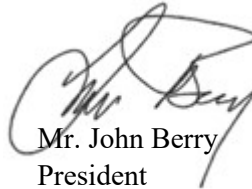
Mr. James Ennis  
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Most Reverend A. Elias Zaidan  
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Mr. Sean Callahan  
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St. Vincent de Paul