



Department of Social Development and World Peace

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June 14, 2007

The Honorable Joe Baca
Chairman
Subcommittee on Department Operations, Oversight, Nutrition, and Forestry
House Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

As you begin marking up the 2007 Farm bill, we would like to highlight areas under your subcommittee's jurisdiction of particular interest to the Catholic Church. We are writing to urge you to support necessary and improved funding for the Food Stamp Program and other nutrition programs to ensure food assistance is provided to all those facing hunger or malnutrition.

In our soup kitchens and in our shelters, we see the faces of the working poor and hungry people. We feed those without shelter, pregnant women and children, and seniors living on a limited income. For many of them, this is the most nutritional meal they get.

The U.S. Bishops stated: "The primary goals of agricultural policies should be providing food for all people and reducing poverty among farmers and farmworkers in this country and abroad." (*For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food: Catholic Reflections on Food, Farmers and Farmworkers*). The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, Catholic Charities USA, and Catholic Relief Services are working together to support policies in the 2007 Farm Bill that support rural communities and family farms; strengthen and expand domestic anti-hunger programs; promote conservation and good stewardship of the land; ensure safe living and working conditions for farmworkers; promote fairness for farmers in developing countries; and provide food security aid efficiently and effectively to hungry people worldwide.

As you know, over 26 million people a month currently benefit from the Food Stamp Program. Yet, approximately 40 percent of those eligible to receive food stamps are not receiving them. Many families leaving welfare do not realize they can obtain transitional food stamps for five months, and may still be eligible for food stamps beyond that period. The Food Stamp Program is the first line of defense against hunger. We urge you to strengthen this essential defense against hunger in the following ways:

- Improve benefit levels to reflect increasing food costs and to allow the purchase of more nutritious food. The current average of \$1 per person per meal and monthly minimum benefit of \$10 need to be adjusted and improved.

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- End the five-year waiting period for adult legal immigrants who in a time of need would otherwise be eligible for food stamps;
- Repeal the current provision penalizing low-income families headed by a parent (usually a single mother) with a past drug conviction;
- Reform asset eligibility requirements and exempt certain retirement, education savings and additional combat pay for our men and women currently serving in our Armed Forces;
- Increase child/dependent care deduction to reflect real costs of such care; and
- Fund improvements in education, outreach and administration to simplify the system and to address enrollment barriers so as to ensure that people who are eligible for and need food stamps actually receive them.

We also urge you to support other nutrition programs, The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and the Commodity Supplemental food program (CSFP), that help low-income people struggling to make ends meet. For example, in 2005, Catholic Charities USA using these programs served over 5.4 million persons in soup kitchens, congregate dining facilities, food banks and pantries, and delivered meals to homes and other food services.

Feeding poor and hungry people here and abroad should be a fundamental priority of our food and farm policy, even in the face of severe budgetary constraints. Thank you for your consideration and for your leadership in addressing hunger and nutrition in the 2007 Farm Bill.

Sincerely,



Most Rev. Nicholas DiMarzio, Ph.D., D.D.
Bishop of Brooklyn
Chairman, Domestic Policy Committee
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops



Rev. Larry Snyder
President of Catholic Charities USA

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Timothy J. Kautza
Executive Director (interim)
National Catholic Rural Life Conference



Ken Hackett
President
Catholic Relief Services

cc: Subcommittee on Department Operations, Oversight, Nutrition, and Forestry