



Department of Social Development and World Peace

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June 6, 2007

The Honorable Mike McIntyre
Chairman
Subcommittee on Specialty Crops, Rural Development and Foreign Agriculture
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 adequate funding for rural development and for international food aid.

In 2003 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 U.S. 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.

Policies and programs are needed that encourage rural development, promoting and maintaining the culture and values of rural communities. These should include policies that encourage a wide range of economic development strategies, especially by fostering the entrepreneurial spirit of rural people and investing in their education and training. They also should include policies that promote and support family farming, support the efforts of farmers to establish co-ops and other cooperative ventures, and encourage widespread diversity in farm ownership.

To this end, we support value-added producer grants to help beginning, socially disadvantaged, and small and mid-size farms and ranches; rural entrepreneur and microenterprise assistance program; and access to broad band telecommunications services to underserved rural communities. We also support efforts to promote renewable energy enterprises, allowing rural communities to benefit from the provision of this public benefit.

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We applaud the suggestion of assessing how USDA defines “rural” throughout its programs in order to better target support for rural communities. We also support investments in infrastructure that improve access to clean water, especially for low-income communities.

On international food aid, we support a robust US food aid program with a greater focus on long-term development, fixing mechanisms for more effective emergency response, and the flexibility of having up to 25% in cash for local and regional purchase of commodities, where appropriate. Specific recommendations include: effective use and automatic replenishment of the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust; \$2 billion upfront for Title II with 50 percent or \$600 million in non-emergency resources to be put into a “safe box;” increased flexibility in the use of cash and commodities within Title II; a bridging mechanism whereby Title II resources can be borrowed from the Commodity Credit Corporation during times of continuing resolutions and other funding gaps; local and regional procurement of commodities to enable rapid response; and removal of trade promotion language from P.L. 480.

Even in the face of severe budgetary constraints, agricultural policies to encourage rural development and promote and maintain the culture and values of rural communities, here and abroad, should be basic foundations and clear priorities in the Farm Bill.

Sincerely,

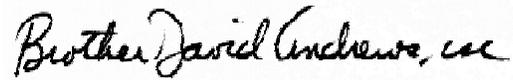


Most Rev. Nicholas DiMarzio, Ph.D., D.D.
Bishop of Brooklyn
Chairman, Domestic Policy Committee
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops



Rev. Larry Snyder
President of Catholic Charities USA

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brother David G. Andrews, CSC". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'B'.

Brother David G. Andrews, CSC
Executive Director
National Catholic Rural Life Conference

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken Hackett". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'K'.

Ken Hackett
President
Catholic Relief Services

cc: Subcommittee on Specialty Crops, Rural Development and Foreign Agriculture
Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health