



Department of Social Development and World Peace

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May 23, 2007

The Honorable Tim Holden
Chairman
Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Energy and Research
House Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In light of the subcommittee's action yesterday on the 2007 Farm bill, we would like to highlight areas of particular interest to the Catholic Church. We are writing to urge you to support adequate funding for conservation initiatives that promote good stewardship of the land and environmentally sound agricultural practices. These actions would provide a public benefit to all of us, but in particular would help rural communities to thrive and benefit from sound conservation and environmental practices.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, National Catholic Rural Life Conference, Catholic Charities USA and Catholic Relief Services are working together to support policies within the 2007 Farm Bill that: support U.S. farm families; address rural poverty; strengthen and adequately fund food stamps and other nutrition 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 aid efficiently and effectively to hungry people worldwide.

As Catholics we believe that protecting God's gift of creation must be a central goal of agriculture policies. Congress should seek to promote soil conservation, improve water quality, protect wildlife and maintain biodiversity. Government resources should be targeted to farmers and ranchers who use environmentally sound agricultural practices.

For example, the Conservation Security Program (CSP) is a program with great demand but that has consistently been underfunded. CSP provides needed technical assistance and financial incentives for farmers and ranchers to adopt practices aimed at fostering healthy, productive and non-eroding soils, clear air and water, energy savings and wildlife habitat. We fully support the goal of the CSP as it was envisioned, a program structure of environmental stewardship payments for working farms attuned to the public good. The program should not be phased out. We urge you to make the changes necessary to simplify the program and provide it with adequate funding levels to allow for greater participation.

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Other conservation programs, like the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), are also an important part of a comprehensive response to ensuring a healthier environment for all Americans and deserve continued support.

We applaud particular efforts in the proposed bill to increase access to conservation programs and incentives to beginning and to socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers. To this end, it is important to address excessive conservation payments to larger farm and ranch operations. We urge you to consider the public health benefits of improving water and air quality as part of the land management practices covered under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQUIP). Targeting these payments to small and moderate size operations would not only encourage wider enrollment but also promote healthier communities.

Farmworkers suffer the highest rate of toxic chemical injury of any workers in the United States. Most work without health insurance or access to workers' compensation. The Farm Bill should require all pesticides used in agricultural production to be reported and labels should include information on the long-term health effects of those pesticides. Essential funding is required for a series of studies on pesticide exposure and the impacts on health, pregnancy and children (e.g. occurrence of cancer, birth defects, adverse reproductive outcomes, etc.).

Even in the face of severe budgetary constraints, agricultural policies to encourage rural development, to promote and maintain the culture and values of rural communities, and to protect God's creation should be basic foundations and clear priorities in the Farm bill.

Sincerely,

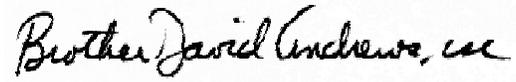


Most Rev. Nicholas DiMarzio, Ph.D., D.D.
Bishop of Brooklyn
Chairman, Domestic Policy Committee
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops



Rev. Larry Snyder
President of Catholic Charities USA

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

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 prominent initial 'K'.

Ken Hackett
President
Catholic Relief Services

cc: Subcommittee on Conservation, Credit, Energy and Research