

## U.S. CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

**2007 Farm Bill Backgrounder****BRINGING THE GOOD NEWS TO A BROKEN WORLD***2007 Catholic Social Ministry Gathering / Washington, DC / February 11-14, 2007*

Every year in mid-February, Catholic leaders from across the country come to Washington to urge decision-makers to work for justice and peace. Each year a set of issues are identified that ask for our legislators' special attention. As Catholics, we advocate for policies that demonstrate respect for human life and dignity and that help build justice and peace. A key issue at the Social Ministry Gathering for 2007 is reauthorization of the U.S. Farm Bill. The Department of Social Development and World Peace of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops developed the following information on this legislation.

**F**or people of faith, food production is unlike any other sector of the economy precisely because it is necessary for life itself. This is the particular lens which shapes our engagement on the Farm Bill, which comes up for renewal every five or six years and sets U.S. policy in a number of key areas:

- Programs in support of certain farm commodity crops
- Food Stamps and emergency food assistance programs
- Conservation programs that promote responsible stewardship of the land
- Rural Development infrastructure and investments
- Food Aid for hungry and distressed communities overseas

Over the next few months, there will be renewed discussion about how U.S. farm policies affect domestic farmers, food producers, and food consumers. The current programs often mismatch needs and resources, leaving out those who need it the most. The changes taking place in U.S. farm communities require that a new Farm Bill support more effectively and fairly those who make our food; build rural communities; and ensure that no one goes hungry.

The new Congress is also facing other challenges due to the changing nature of U.S. agriculture in a global economy, the need for sources of energy that are agriculture-based to address U.S. dependency on oil and the opportunity to promote rural development. Global trade talks around agriculture also seek compliance of U.S. farm programs with international trade rules. As the U.S. seeks to gain access to overseas markets, developing countries are asking the U.S. to cut its agricultural subsidies that, many argue, promote overproduction and harm poor-country farmers.

Half the world's population relies on agriculture to make a living. Most poor or extremely poor people around the globe (i.e. those living on less than \$2 or \$1 per day) live in rural areas, so agriculture is a primary means for alleviating poverty.

Congress must reauthorize the Farm Bill this year. Senate and House Agriculture Committees have signaled they would like to have a bill introduced by the end of August. As Committee hearings on the shape of the next Farm Bill intensify, it will be important for those concerned with poverty to engage in this debate.

**USCCB POSITION**

The primary goals of agricultural policies should be providing food for all people and providing a decent life for farmers and farmworkers in this country and abroad. A key measure of every agricultural program and legislative initiative is whether it helps the most vulnerable farmers, farmworkers, and their families and whether it contributes to a global food system that provides basic nutrition for all. USCCB support policies and programs that encourage rural development, promoting and maintaining the culture and values of rural communities.

Limited government resources for subsidies and other forms of support should be targeted to small and moderate-sized farms, especially minority-owned farms, to help them through difficult times caused by changes in global agricultural markets or weather patterns that destroy crops. Agricultural subsidies often go to a few large producers, while smaller family farms struggle to survive. Rather than simply rewarding production, which can lead to surpluses and falling prices, government resources should reward environmentally sound and sustainable farming practices. ■

*For further information on this USCCB position, contact the Department of Social Development and World Peace at 202-541-3380 or [sdwepmail@usccb.org](mailto:sdwepmail@usccb.org)*