

NGO Statement of Support: International Food Assistance Programs in the 2018 Farm Bill



13 June 2018

As U.S.-based charities and faith-based organizations working to end hunger, poverty, and malnutrition around the world, we express our deep gratitude to Chairman Pat Roberts and Ranking Member Debbie Stabenow for their work in crafting the bipartisan Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (“Farm Bill”). This bill not only reaffirms Congressional support for international food security programs authorized in the Farm Bill, but also strengthens them with common sense changes that will make them more effective.

The Senate Farm Bill advances key reforms to the Food for Peace program that our community supports, such as removing the requirement to monetize commodities and recognizing the role of the Community Development Fund in Title II Development Food Security Activities. These enhancements will increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the Food for Peace Program, allowing more people to be reached with existing resources.

The Senate Farm Bill also allocates ten percent of McGovern-Dole resources to local and regional procurement of commodities, which will help host communities better contribute to the long-term sustainability of school feeding programs. Further, the Senate Farm Bill dedicates close to \$40 million in direct programmatic support for Food for Progress which substantially reduces reliance on monetization for program funding.

As we have learned over decades of experience, the conditions and contexts of food insecurity differ widely across the world. For this reason, U.S.-funded international emergency and long-term food security programs must respond with a range of tools, modalities, and interventions, including food vouchers, cash transfers, local and regional procurement, and U.S. commodities. We are grateful that the Senate Agriculture Committee recognizes this need, and chose to continue and build upon flexibilities instituted in the 2014 Farm Bill.

While the Senate Farm Bill makes several positive changes to international food assistance programs, it does not yet address a key hinderance to these programs – cargo preference. Current requirements significantly inhibit beneficiary reach by directing more food aid dollars towards ocean freight carriers and fewer to the purchase of food for people in need. We urge Congress, whether in the Farm Bill or in other legislative vehicles, to reduce the impact of cargo preference on international food aid programs.

Ending hunger and malnutrition in our lifetime is possible, but many challenges to this goal remain. As the Food and Agriculture Organization recently reported, nearly 124 million people across 51 countries and territories faced crisis levels of acute food security in 2017. Between 2016 and 2017, an additional 11 million people required urgent food assistance. International food security programs authorized in the Farm Bill are vital to addressing the challenge of hunger worldwide and we urge Congress to support these provisions in any final Farm Bill package.