

# Background Information and Talking Points: Farm Bill 2023 Reauthorization

## OVERVIEW

The background information and talking points in this document serve as a guide for how to structure your communications and meetings with your members of Congress.

Catholic Relief Services believes that our work together in the United States is the outward expression of missionary discipleship. Together, we are called to encounter Christ in the members of our human family most in need, and to share the Good News with others—becoming prophetic advocates for justice and the common good. CRS' campaigns on hunger and climate change allow you to do just that.

As an opportunity to stand with people experiencing hunger and climate change, your communications and congressional meetings will focus on advocating for the 2023 Farm Bill Reauthorization.

**Your voice matters!** Your members of Congress want to know *why* you and your community care about these issues. As you prepare to meet with your senator/representative, reflect on the stories of our sisters and brothers around the world that you can share to illustrate the importance of caring for our global family and how you and your community are taking action to support people in need.

## BACKGROUND

From 1990-2014, the world made tremendous progress in reducing the number of people suffering from hunger and malnutrition. However, in recent years, many of the important and lifesaving gains that were once achieved have now been reversed.

According to the United Nations World Food Program, 349 million people are experiencing crisis or worse levels of acute food insecurity and malnutrition—a magnitude of hunger that our world has not seen before. Families are struggling to meet their food needs due to the compound effects of conflict, climate change, COVID-19 and rising food costs. Inflation of food prices has put people under tremendous strain, while supply chain interruptions have impeded humanitarian operations and disrupted local and regional markets.

Vulnerable communities are experiencing these economic shocks on a severe scale. The rising costs of food, fertilizer and fuel make it difficult for individuals to build sustainable livelihoods, secure a steady income or feed their family with nutritious food. Many regions are also experiencing the compounding effects of climate change, such as in the Dry Corridor of Central America, Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa where communities are facing the worst drought ever recorded 40 years after five consecutive failed rainy seasons. During these conditions, families are forced to migrate to other regions in search of food, causing conflict over land and resources, which then results in disruptions to local food, livestock and crop production.

CRS is collaborating with partners to respond to immediate needs to prevent potential famine and loss of income and livelihoods, while at the same time ramping up programming to strengthen resilience. However, the

driving factors of food insecurity will continue to impact people experiencing vulnerability unless action is taken now to adapt to the changing realities in our world.

With the world off-track to eradicate hunger by 2030, our leaders must urgently come together to increase investments for poverty-focused assistance to meet the growing global need and ensure that all forms of assistance are flexible, evidence-based and meet the specific needs of communities experiencing food insecurity.

As Pope Francis highlighted on World Food Day 2021, “[Overcoming hunger is] one of humanity’s greatest challenges.” This is why CRS pursues a multi-sectoral approach to tackling hunger and malnutrition—to address the root causes in a holistic way. Additionally, CRS continues to expand its global footprint, touching the lives of more than 190 million people in need in over 100 countries worldwide. CRS is helping to transform lives and livelihoods by catalyzing new economic opportunities for those who have been excluded and left behind—including restoring degraded lands through water-smart agriculture, providing access to microfinance for rural smallholder farmers, helping local schools establish sustainable school meals programs, providing nutrition support to new mothers and infants and improving peoples’ access to clean and reliable drinking water. CRS is proud to continue our partnership alongside Congress and the Administration to enact timely legislation to address global hunger and support the implementation of U.S.-funded emergency and development food security programming around the world.

### What is the Farm Bill?

The Farm Bill is a multiyear package of legislation that oversees a variety of domestic and international food and agricultural programs. While the overwhelming majority of the Farm Bill covers programs in the United States, like crop insurance, forestry and domestic nutrition assistance, CRS focuses its advocacy on Title III, which addresses foreign trade and international food aid programs. Programs authorized in this title include **Food for Peace**, **Food for Progress**, **McGovern-Dole Food for Education** and **Farmer-to-Farmer**.

In anticipation of the 2023 Farm Bill reauthorization, CRS and its supporters will engage legislators—especially members of the House and Senate Agriculture Committees—to reauthorize each of these four Farm Bill programs and to amend specific provisions—or requirements—in the bill that strengthen and improve program efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability.

Reauthorizing Food for Peace, Food for Progress, McGovern-Dole Food for Education and Farmer-to-Farmer opens up the ability for U.S. funding to be appropriated to each of these programs, which is a separate step that happens during the annual appropriations process.

### The Farm Bill Process

The 2018 Farm Bill is set to expire on September 30, 2023. Throughout the spring, stakeholders interested in U.S. domestic and international agriculture, such as local farmers, NGOs, shippers and ordinary citizens, are sharing their Farm Bill related priorities with the House and Senate Agriculture Committees. Simultaneously, Congress is performing oversight of these programs with hearings in Washington, D.C. and around the country on various Farm Bill authorized programs.

These hearings and the sharing of priorities begins the Farm Bill drafting process in both chambers of Congress. For most of the process, the two chambers work parallel—but independently—of each other. The House and Senate Agriculture Committees will negotiate, draft and markup—or amend—their bill before it passes out of committee and is considered on the chamber floor. During floor consideration, all members of both chambers will have the opportunity to debate amendments and propose alternate language until a compromise is reached within the respective chamber. The bills then move to conference, where a body of leadership-appointed House



and Senate members develop a single bill that will need to be passed by both chambers of Congress, before then being signed into law by the president.

During each of these steps, constituents have an opportunity to raise their voice and educate their members of Congress on how international aid and development programs within the Farm Bill provide a pathway for our global family to build a more resilient future and thrive. Engaging regularly with your legislators ensures these issues are kept fresh in the minds of congressional decision-makers.

Once the Farm Bill becomes law, the U.S. departments and agencies that oversee implementation of Farm Bill-authorized programs, like the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), must prepare rules and regulations for how to carry out the provisions of the bill.

## THE ASK

During this time of unprecedented and dire global food insecurity, I ask that you prioritize timely passage of the 2023 Farm Bill, including:

- Reauthorizing lifesaving, hunger-reducing international programs, specifically Food for Peace Title II, McGovern-Dole Food for Education, Farmer-to-Farmer and Food for Progress.
- Increasing flexibility for non-emergency Title II Food for Peace development programming by:
  - Making U.S. commodities in non-emergency programs a programming option—rather than a requirement—to allow implementing partners to tailor activities specifically to the needs of the community *and*;
  - Combining the authorizations under Section 202(e) and ITSH of the Food for Peace Act, thereby maintaining congressional oversight of funds while streamlining budgeting and lessening the administrative burden for implementing partners.
- Increasing the amount of funding set aside for local and regional procurement within the McGovern-Dole Food for Education program to enable programming that better supports local farmers regionally and within communities. Additionally, capacity-building support for farmers should be incorporated into the local regional procurement component of McGovern-Dole.

## FARM BILL PROGRAMS

### Title II Food for Peace (FFP)

For more than 65 years, the Food for Peace program has provided food assistance to people in need around the world. In an emergency, FFP delivers U.S.-sourced agricultural commodities as well as cash, vouchers and locally procured food to people facing crises. In-kind aid—such as food commodities—allows people to receive enough food to survive and prevents them from having to migrate in search of better opportunities or sell off critical assets like seeds or livestock.

In addition to responding to disasters when they strike, FFP works with communities that are susceptible to recurrent shocks to improve and sustain their food and nutrition security through non-emergency programs authorized in Section 202(b) of the Food for Peace Act, called Resilience Food Security Activities (RFSAs). These are unique, multi-year programs that build on emergency food security interventions to strengthen the resilience of people, communities, countries and systems in a way that reduces chronic vulnerability and facilitates inclusive growth. RFSAs work to ensure that communities graduate out of poverty and reduce a community's need for humanitarian assistance down the line because they are now able to mitigate the impact of shocks and bounce back after crises.



**Where is improvement needed?** USAID does not have enough flexibility within the Title II funding to allow its programs to be tailored to the needs of each individual community. Current budget category constraints required for Title II funding make it difficult for USAID to cover the costs of quality program design and increasingly expensive emergency logistics needs at the same time as the non-emergency programs. The economic fallout of events driving the global food crisis are making it increasingly important to optimize every dollar of foreign assistance.

As Congress works to reauthorize the Food for Peace Act, technical changes to the legislation could have profound and transformational impacts on the future of U.S. food assistance, while maintaining the U.S.' legacy as the leading donor of humanitarian food assistance, including by providing in-kind, U.S.-sourced agricultural commodities. To do this, Congress can:

- Make U.S. commodities in non-emergency programs a programming option—rather than a requirement—so that implementing partners can tailor support to the specific needs of the community.
- FFP would continue to provide U.S.-sourced commodities through Title II emergency programs, while maintaining the flexibility to design non-emergency programs for the singular purpose of helping communities build resilience.
- Establish a single associated cost category to combine the authorizations under Section 202(e) and ITSH of the Food for Peace Act. ITSH covers all expenses associated with in-country shipping and handling, and 202(e) covers funds needed for programming and market-based assistance. This maintains congressional oversight of funds while streamlining budgeting and lessening the administrative burden for partners, like CRS.

These incremental changes to the Food for Peace Act as part of the Farm Bill reauthorization could strengthen U.S. food assistance programs, ensuring that food aid programs are updated to meet the needs of today and can continue to save even more lives for years to come.

**What will these changes achieve?** These incremental changes will help achieve three outcomes. First, RFSA programs would be designed to respond to the needs of the community as they change throughout the duration of the program. For example, as a community becomes more self-sufficient in providing for themselves, they would require less in-kind aid and more assistance with capacity building and resilience strengthening.

Second, organizations like CRS that implement FFP programming, will be able to use the appropriate mix of market modalities—such as food commodities, cash and vouchers—in a way that addresses a community's specific needs.

Third, organizations like CRS will be able to more easily work across sectors to support communities through a more holistic approach—including helping families access nutritious food, build sustainable livelihoods and receive resilience and disaster preparedness training—that lead to greater self-sufficiency. In addition to providing food or vouchers, these changes allow organizations like CRS to further address the root causes of hunger through activities such as creating savings groups, training farmers on resource management, or working with new moms to improve nutrition for themselves and their baby.

Overall, it is important to ensure that we are using the best tools and resources available to build capacity, self-sufficiency and resiliency within local communities—decreasing the need for future humanitarian assistance.

### **McGovern-Dole Food for Education**

The McGovern-Dole Food for Education program works with existing school meal programs in food-insecure communities around the world to increase child literacy rates, improve nutritional outcomes—especially for young girls—and enhance dietary practices. Funds for McGovern-Dole also provide nutrition services to pregnant and nursing mothers, infants and preschoolers; as well as provide financial and technical assistance to schools and local producers to build sustainable and long-lasting programs within the community. A legacy of

late U.S. Senators George McGovern and Bob Dole, the program reached more than 4 million children, women and families in fiscal year 2021.

A change in the 2018 Farm Bill required the USDA to allocate 10% of McGovern-Dole funding towards a Local and Regional Procurement (LRP) component that allows program implementors—like CRS—to supplement U.S. in-kind commodities with locally sourced food. This change helps support local farmers, markets and economies, improves the capacity and sustainability of communities to provide for themselves, and can enhance the dietary diversity of school meals by including culturally appropriate produce.

**Where is additional support needed?** CRS seeks to ensure that school meal programs continue beyond the life cycle of an award without taking away from the program’s efforts to achieving nutrition and education successes. To do this Congress can:

- Increase the amount set aside for LRP activities within the McGovern-Dole Food for Education program to enable programming that better supports local farmers within the community or region, without taking away from the efforts towards nutrition, literacy and education.
- Incorporate capacity-building support to farmers in the LRP component.

**What will additional support achieve?** LRP activities ensure local nutritious food is available to students, help schools and farms form strong relationships, and provide them with the capacity building and planning support to continue their program long after the end of a McGovern-Dole award.

For countries that have demonstrated interest and have the capacity to implement their own LRP programs, increased LRP will help acknowledge the country’s and government’s roles in serving as a vital safety net system for hungry children. Expanding LRP will also support local communities in building sustainable and long-lasting school feeding programs and increase the amount of food that can be purchased from local farmers that have the capacity to do so. LRP funded at this stage of readiness can help farmers scale their businesses and become a reliable supplier for schools long into the future. It can also drive up local supply availability and ideally lower local food prices. This is important because in many countries, imported food is cheaper than domestically grown food, making it difficult for smallholder farmers to compete.

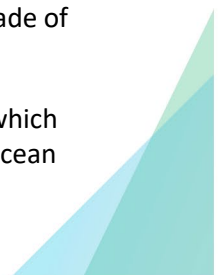
Investments in LRP engage local actors as equal partners in holistic and meaningful ways to strengthen capacity, facilitate decision-making, develop their own solutions and mobilize local resources to support sustainable and transformative outcomes. This type of support will help catalyze change so that children have access to healthy school meals and local farmers gain the training and resources they need to successfully supply food for their community. These changes will ensure that when an award ends, communities can continue these programs on their own, reducing the need for further humanitarian assistance.

### Food for Progress (FFPr)

Food for Progress assists low- and middle-income nations with modernizing and strengthening their agricultural sectors. The program works by donating U.S. agricultural products—or commodities—to recipient countries, selling them on the local market and then using the proceeds to fund economic, agricultural and development projects.

FFPr projects train farmers in animal and plant health, help improve farming methods, develop road and utility systems, establish cooperatives for farmers, provide microcredit or small loans at low interest and develop agricultural systems. Its two principal objectives are to improve agricultural productivity and expand trade of agricultural products.

A mandatory-funded program, FFPr is currently authorized at \$40 million under the 2018 Farm Bill, in which funds are to be exclusively used for the cost of transporting products overseas by ship, also known as ocean



freight costs. The program does not have a cap on the amount of commodities shipped, as the amount shipped will be determined by the cost of ocean freight transportation.

***CRS supports the reauthorization of Food for Progress to continue the program's success into the future.***

### **Farmer-to-Farmer (F2F)**

The Farmer-to-Farmer program promotes sustainable economic growth, food security, and agricultural development worldwide through volunteer technical assistance from U.S. farmers, agribusinesses, cooperatives and universities. F2F volunteers work with farmers, producer groups, rural businesses and service providers to develop local capacity necessary to increase food production and rural incomes, expand economic growth, and address environmental and natural resource management challenges.

***CRS hopes F2F's reauthorization will build off lessons learned and continue to pair U.S. volunteers with local experts to encourage sustainable knowledge and skills transfer.***

## **TALKING POINTS FOR CONGRESSIONAL MEETINGS**

### **Framing**

#### **Begin with gratitude**

*Thank you for your time to discuss the reauthorization and increased flexibility of the 2023 Farm Bill. We look forward to discussing the international programming authorized in the Farm Bill.*

**Express gratitude.** Check your member of Congress' website and thank them for something they have done in the recent past.

#### **Introduction: Who you are and why you're there**

*As people of faith seeking justice and care for all in our world, we believe there is a moral obligation to provide assistance for our human family and address the root causes of poverty, hunger and climate change.*

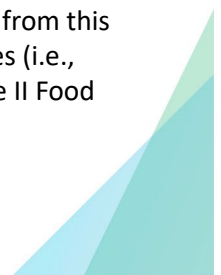
**Share about yourself/the group** and your work in the state/district. Also share about your connection to CRS and why you support the work of CRS.

**Share a personal story** to illustrate why you/your group support international humanitarian and development work, including your concern about our human family and why issues like poverty and global hunger matter to you.

#### **Moving to the issue: Set the stage for the conversation**

*One of the ways to ensure that U.S. funding for international humanitarian and development work reaches vulnerable communities as effectively and efficiently as possible is by continuing to authorize and improve international programming in the 2023 Farm Bill.*

**Share a story** about the importance and impact of these programs overseas. Consider including details from this background document, CRS National Chapter & Club Calls (i.e., [April-June 2022 recordings](#)) or CRS stories (i.e., [Maria Ana's story](#) on McGovern-Dole Food for Education or the [Rasoanandrasana family's story](#) on Title II Food for Peace).





**Share about your community's connection** to these programs and speak to priority areas your member of Congress may value that are related to these international Farm Bill programs. For example, discuss how these programs can potentially be an asset to local farmers in their district or state since the commodities sourced for many of these programs are being grown by local farmers in the U.S.

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### Discussion

#### Questions to Ask

- How does the senator/representative plan to approach the international food aid and development programs in the Farm Bill?
- What can I do, as a constituent, to continue to advance these important issues with the senator/representative?

#### Comments to Raise

- If the senator/representative travels abroad, ask if he/she would like to visit CRS programming in the future. CRS is in more than 100 countries around the world and would welcome an opportunity to show the senator/representative the impact United States investments in food security and climate change adaptation have on the ground.
- Let your senator/representative know that you—along with CRS—can serve as a resource both in Washington, DC and back home in their state/district. Express an interest in continuing to dialogue with them, or their staff, on these and other issues of mutual interest.

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