



## *International Food Aid and the 2007 Farm Bill*

As Congress develops the 2007 Farm Bill over the next few months, it has the opportunity to make sure that U.S. global food aid programs feed more people, help them to be less vulnerable to emergencies and ultimately rise out of poverty.

Catholics and other people of good will throughout the United States are advocating for 2007 Farm Bill policies that further reduce hunger and poverty both in the United States and abroad. The 2007 Farm Bill will govern U.S. agricultural policy at home and abroad for the next five years and is the main vehicle that structures U.S. Food Aid programs. As a part of a broad Catholic effort to address a range of concerns about the Farm Bill, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) is calling for Congress to change policies that have driven down the food available for assistance, ultimately leading to cuts in important hunger programs worldwide.

As the world's largest provider of food aid, the United States fed over 70 million people through emergency and development-focused programs in 2006. The response comprised more than half of all global food aid, according to the Government Accountability Office (GAO).

Yet that amounts to a drop in the bucket in a world where more than 850 million people do not have the food they need to meet their basic needs. While the U.S. has committed to helping cut in half the number of people living in extreme poverty by 2015 as part of the U.N. Millennium Development Goals, its own aid policies need to be strengthened to help this commitment.

Increased costs, such as transportation and other changes over the last five years have led to a 43 percent decline in the amount of food distributed as aid, according to the GAO. Currently, the cost of transportation and overhead make up 65 percent of expenditures related to food aid.

Meanwhile, the rising number of conflicts and natural disasters in the world has caused food and humanitarian emergencies to double from an average of about 15 per year in the 1980s to more than 30 per year since 2000. The U.S. government has repeatedly shifted more food aid resources to emergencies with resources that by law should be reserved for helping poor communities develop the skills to be self-sufficient. While this approach feeds people suffering in emergency situations in the short term, it is at the expense of the chronically hungry.

The 2007 U.S. Farm Bill, which should be reauthorized before the current Farm Bill expires in September, has the opportunity to change that. To do this the bill must:

- Ensure that 50 percent of Title II food aid, the resources used to alleviate hunger in poor countries, be allocated for non-emergency food programs that foster development and food security. This aid must be safeguarded by eliminating the waiver that allows these resources to be used in emergencies.
- Set aside adequate resources for food emergencies through the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust. The Trust is similar to a bank from which the Secretary of Agriculture can borrow grain reserves and cash for use during unforeseen food crises. But when responding to emergencies, the secretary has been

hesitant to tap into this Trust. Rather Congress has repeatedly allowed money set aside for development programs to be used in emergencies. The result: one group of hungry people is fed at the expense of another.

- Make sure that up to 25% of Title II resources are in the form of cash that can be used to buy food locally or closer to where food is needed.
- Allow for 25 percent of anti-hunger activities to be in the form of cash to complement food distribution. Currently U.S. food aid is almost entirely food-based. However, effective hunger alleviation programs don't run on food alone. They also require cash, which funds efforts that help people become less vulnerable to food emergencies in the future.

Organizations such as CRS are sometimes required to convert food aid to cash through a process called "monetization," which requires that grain be purchased at market value from U.S. farmers, shipped overseas, and then sold in order to get cash to fund programs. This approach is costly, time-consuming and inefficient. As a result, the poor overseas are left with a much smaller portion of the aid that was intended for them in the first place.

As CRS works to include these provisions in the Farm Bill in upcoming months, we will be calling upon our network of supporters to contact their elected officials to help shape a Farm Bill that best serves the needs of the poor overseas.

### *Things You Can Do*

Sign up for CRS' Legislative Network to receive information and for opportunities to take action on this and other pressing global issues. Sign up for the network here: <http://actioncenter.crs.org/signup>

- Learn, discuss, and pray about global issues that affect the poor and how our advocacy efforts can make a difference. Visit our website <http://advocacy.crs.org> for educational, action, and prayer resources.
- Share this educational resource with your family, friends, and fellow parishioners.

### Know Your Food Aid Vocabulary

*A well-informed constituent has a powerful voice in impressing the importance of issues upon her or his elected officials. In the food aid debate that will be playing out in Congress this summer, it will pay to know these terms.*

**The 2007 Farm Bill** – legislation that defines U.S. food and agricultural policy both internationally and domestically for a period of five to seven years. Much of the policy in the bill focuses on farming in the United States. Provisions that govern foreign agricultural trade and international food aid are the focus of concern for CRS.

**Title II Food Aid** – Also called the PL 480 Title II Food for Peace Program, this is the longest running and largest U.S. government international assistance program. CRS is among the Private Voluntary Organizations that provide food distribution and development efforts through this program. Currently it is an integral part of CRS development programs in 23 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, serving more than 3.5 million people.

**Private Voluntary Organizations (PVO's)** – U.S.-based, tax-exempt, non-profit organizations working in, or intending to become engaged in, international development activities. (Source: U.S. Agency for International Development). Catholic Relief Services is a PVO.

**Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust** – a food reserve for Title II food aid administered under the authority of the Secretary of Agriculture. The food in the reserve is set aside to respond to unanticipated food crisis in developing countries. Up to 4 million metric tons of U.S. wheat, corn, sorghum, and rice can be kept in reserve.

**Emergency food aid programs** include responding to the nutritional needs of people who are suffering from natural disasters, wars, or famine.

**Non-emergency food aid programs** use food as a long-term development tool to support education, agriculture, and health. CRS uses multi-year development programs to address the root causes of food insecurity.

**Millennium Development Goals** – Measurable goals and targets for combating poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women. World leaders from 189 countries agreed to these goals at the U.N. Millennium Summit in 2000. Among them is a commitment to cut world hunger in half by 2015.

**Food Security** – Food security is access to enough food for an active and healthy life today and tomorrow.

**Food Insecurity** – Food insecurity is lack of access to enough food for an active and healthy life today and tomorrow.