

## THE 2012 FARM BILL: OUR FAITH BRIDGES THE URBAN-RURAL DIVIDE



Much of the country imagines Oregon as a land of mountains, forests, skiing; the great outdoors. It might surprise them that 28% of Oregon land is classified as farmland. Twenty-seven percent of Oregonians are classified as rural. A drive through the Willamette Valley is predominantly colored by farmland. Farms play as significant a role in Oregon's mythology yet Oregon experiences a significant urban-rural divide. The U.S. Farm Bill, which is due for Congressional review and reauthorization in 2012, is one way to bridge this divide.

The U.S. Farm Bill is up for Congressional review and reauthorization in 2012. The Farm Bill is important to the Catholic Church because food and nutrition programs for seniors, children and low-income persons are authorized and funded through this bill.

The Farm Bill is also important to the Catholic Church because it contains programs that sustain, strengthen and develop rural communities and small towns, "the backbone of the social and economic life of America."

In *For I was Hungry and You Gave Me Food: Catholic Reflections on Food, Farmers and Farmworkers*, the U.S. bishops wrote, "The primary goals of agriculture policies should be providing food for all people and reducing poverty among farmers and farmworkers in this country and abroad." Small farmers are economically and socially important to rural communities. They are also the providers of the nutritious fruits and vegetables at farmers' markets, rural, urban and suburban.

Last week the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic Relief Services, Catholic Charities USA, and the National Catholic Rural Life Conference addressed a [letter](#) to Congress as it began hearings on the 2012 Farm Bill.

This Catholic Farm Bill Coalition asked for support for a Farm Bill that provides for poor and hungry people both at home and abroad, offers effective support for those who grow our food, ensures fairness to family farmers and ranchers, and promotes stewardship of the land. They urged that the Farm Bill target limited resources, such as subsidies and direct payments, to those farmers and ranchers who truly need assistance to be competitive and successful.

Here in Oregon the Oregon Faith Roundtable Against Hunger supports just and adequate funding levels for agriculture policies that provide food for the hungry, poor and vulnerable:

- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (Food Stamps)** (ensures that low-income families receive the support they need to put food on the table)
- **The Emergency Food Assistance Program** (where your food bank, food pantry and soup kitchen receive much of their food)
- **Seniors Farmers' Market Nutrition Program** (fresh, nutritious, unprepared, locally grown fruits/vegetables from [Farmers' Markets](#), [Roadside Stands](#) and [Community Supported Agriculture](#) programs to low-income seniors)
- **Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program** (fruits and vegetables for elementary schools that serve a high number of low-income children)



The Catholic Farm Bill Coalition added its support for:

**International Food Security and Development (PL 480 Title II food assistance programs)**

(combats chronic hunger, build resilience against drought and other natural disasters and provide adequate nutrition for poor families.)

**Conservation Stewardship Program** (provides technical assistance and financial incentives for farmers and ranchers to adopt practices aimed at fostering healthy, productive and non-eroding soils, clean air and water, energy savings and wildlife habitat)

**Value-Added Producer grants and the Rural Micro-Entrepreneur Assistance Program**

(helps beginning, socially disadvantaged, and small and mid-sized farms and ranchers)

**A reduction of agricultural subsidies and direct payments** (targeted instead to small and moderate-sized farms, especially minority owned-farms, with assistance to those who truly need assistance and with support to those who comply with environmentally sound and sustainable farming practices.)

The Catholic Farm Bill Coalition closed its letter to Congress with a charge: “In the face of budgetary constraints, the 2012 Farm Bill is an opportunity to address our nation’s broken and outdated agricultural policies. This is a crucial time to build a more just framework that puts poor and hungry people first, serves small and moderate-sized family farms, promotes sustainable stewardship of the land and helps vulnerable farmers and rural communities both at home and in developing countries.”

The reauthorization of the Farm Bill is a chance for the rural and urban communities of the Archdiocese of Portland, the Church of Western Oregon and Oregon to unite as one voice and support our hungry, our poor, our vulnerable, our small family farms, our moderate-sized family farms, our rural communities, our local-for-local food systems, our land, our workers, our food and our faith.

The Office of Life, Justice and Peace will send updates on the Farm Bill, advocacy opportunities, and ways to get involved in Archdiocesan coalitions.

The tapestry of Oregon's history is woven with the fabric of farms and farmworkers. Agriculture is an essential component of Oregon's economy; agriculture also occupies a special place in our Catholic faith.