



The Farm Bill is about food: how we grow it, how we harvest it, how we deal with our food crops when they fail, and how we distribute it. It is an important—and massive—piece of federal legislation that is revisited and re-approved once every five years.

We all need food to survive, and ensuring a sustainable and nutritious food supply for U.S. citizens and those in need around the world is one of the principle visions of the United States Department of Agriculture. Food helps to establish peace, wellness and stability. Without a reliable source of food, families face malnutrition, countries can swarm into conflict, and the light of life can begin to fade. The Farm Bill seeks to sustain a reliable food supply through both domestic and international programs.

Domestically, the bill provides crop subsidies and grants for farmers to protect them from fluctuating markets. According to the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service, the number of young people entering farming continues to decline, but the number of new farmers and ranchers over the age of 35 as well as the number of smaller farms and ranches nationwide continue to rise. Programs such as the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program (BFRDP) are especially important in building a strong new generation of farmers and producers to sustain food production throughout our nation. BFRDP provides grants to organizations for education, mentoring, and technical assistance initiatives for beginning farmers or ranchers, encouraging the growth of a new generation of agricultural producers. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides food assistance to 42 million people in the United States, ensuring greater access to food for families, and conservation efforts encourage sustainable farming and ecologically-friendly production methods.

Internationally, the Farm Bill helps small farmers in underdeveloped countries through training programs such as the Farmer to Farmer (F2F) program, which functions on an entirely volunteer-based system, pairing international farmers with volunteers who have an expertise in farming or ag-related fields. The goal of the program is to promote sustainable improvements in food security and agricultural processing, production and marketing.

These experiences, which occur over a short time or can extend over a year, can have profound impacts. A story shared by an F2F volunteer on [usaid.gov](https://www.usaid.gov) who worked to promote and extend coffee production in specific regions in Haiti details how the program changed the lives of thousands of Haitians. Two years after F2F began work on this project, "Coffee bean sales have now impacted the lives of nearly 3,000 farming families in Haiti, and the company has started reintroducing Haitian coffee to the world. In addition to linking producers to markets, F2F volunteers have worked to improve Haiti's coffee sector by training producers in sustainable production techniques and protecting plants against pests and diseases. F2F volunteer Jean Tsafack-Djiagu trained 97 coffee producers on using shade to increase yields and protect plants from the destructive Coffee Berry Borer. Together, trainees established a Reflection Committee to lead production activities and declared, 'We are ready to start a new life with coffee production.'" *excerpt courtesy of usaid.gov*

But the proposed House and Senate Farm Bills aren't perfect. The USCCB wrote a joint letter to the U.S. House Committee on Agriculture regarding the House version of the Farm Bill this April, raising concerns about changes to the SNAP program which would cause millions to lose their benefits, and elimination of the Conservation Stewardship Program, which helps protect farmland from exploitation. At the same time, the letter expresses appreciation for support given in the bill for international food assistance programs.

The House and Senate passed different versions of the Farm Bill this summer, and now a conference committee will be formed in an effort to negotiate a compromise bill that must be approved before the end of September. Any programs and funding approved in the 2018 Farm Bill will extend through 2023, when the bill will be reviewed and renewed once again.

This *Messenger* aims to provide our readers with a review of some of the concerns about the Farm Bill, and how we can advocate together for the passage of a bill that ensures a safe and nutritious food supply will continue to be available to all.

What is in the Farm Bill?

The Farm Bill is an omnibus, multi-year law that governs an array of agricultural and food programs. Like an ear of corn, the Farm Bill has many kernels that make up its whole. Let's shuck the husk and reveal what's inside.

Title I: Commodity Programs

A variety of programs to protect farmers against steep fluctuations in prices, particularly corn, wheat, soybean, cotton, rice, peanut, and dairy producers.

Title II: Conservation

Includes programs to assist farmers in preventing soil erosion and the use of ecologically friendly methods like drip irrigation. It also includes programs that pay farmers to produce on less acreage.

Title III: Trade

These funds are used to promote U.S. crops overseas and provide food aid abroad. The government also offers some assistance to farmers in developing countries to help them implement better growing practices.

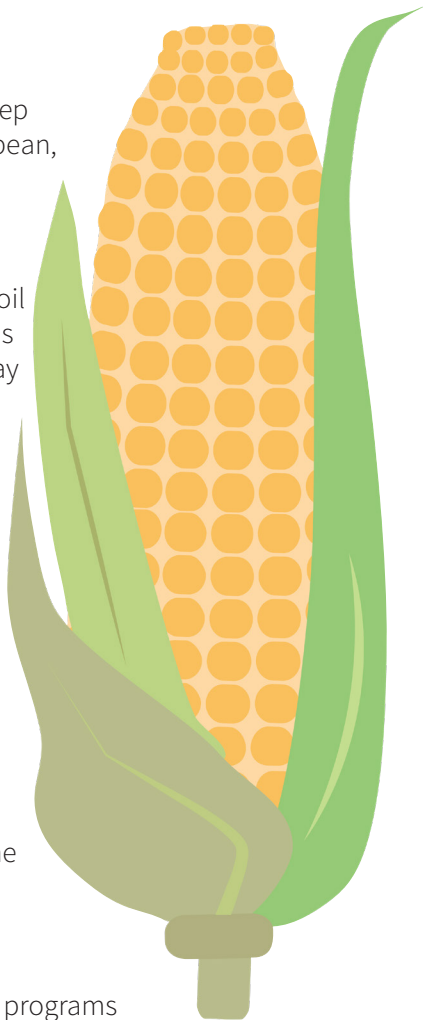
Title IV: Nutrition

The largest portion of Farm Bill policy, the bulk of the nutrition section is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which helps low-income families gain access to food.

Title IX: Energy

Funding for biofuels as well as for energy-efficiency programs in rural areas are wrapped up in this section, which also provides money to help develop biochemicals and bioplastics industries, in an attempt to reduce the country's use of fossil fuels.

Other titles in the bill include: Title V: Credit, Title VI: Rural Development, Title VII: Research, Title VIII: Forestry, Title X: Horticulture and Organic Agriculture, Title XI: Crop Insurance, and Title XII: Miscellaneous. For more information and to read the House bill in its entirety, visit www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/2/.



MCC FARM BILL PRIORITIES



The MCC is focused on maintaining SNAP benefits for Missourians without additional work requirements. The MCC respects and supports the dignity of work, but in the case of SNAP recipients, it is often a matter of access. Many recipients are willing to work, but have no transportation or childcare options, limiting their access to jobs or job training programs. Read more about the SNAP program below.

- SNAP funding totals \$70.9 billion within the proposed 2018 Farm Bill, and serves 42+ million people annually.
- It supports those whose wages are too low to lift them out of poverty. SNAP is an important work support: 75 percent of the people who receive benefits for a year or less—and about 40 percent overall—live in households with earnings. The Census Bureau indicates that SNAP would lift more than 3.9 million Americans—including 1.7 million children—out of poverty if its benefits were included in the official measures of income and poverty.
- It provides flexibility to states while ensuring the protection of a national safety net. The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) continued the commitment to a national nutrition safety net and gave states a substantial new opportunity to streamline complex rules. In addition, states may also use SNAP's waiver procedures to test changes to a variety of program rules.
- The U.S. House version of the Farm Bill imposes stricter work requirements upon SNAP recipients. Some predict this will result in 2 million people losing access to SNAP benefits. The Senate version does not include these changes to the SNAP program.

For more detailed information about how the SNAP program operates, visit www.fns.usda.gov/building-healthy-america-profile-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program



Want to read more stories like these? Join the Missouri Catholic Advocacy Network (MOCAN)

As a MOCAN member, you will have the option to receive the MCC Weekly Update (email), Action Alerts, Good News mailed newsletter, Messenger and Messenger Online. Through our Action Alerts, you can quickly communicate directly with your legislators and let your voice be heard. Visit mocatholic.org or call us at 573.635.7239 to join for free!

Q&A

A Catholic Response to the Farm Bill

“Let us be clear. Food shortage is not something natural, it is not a given, something obvious or self-evident. . . The earth, abused and exploited, continues in many parts of the world to yield its fruits, offering us the best of itself. The faces of the starving remind us that we have foiled its purposes.”
(For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food: Catholic Reflections on Food, Farmers and Farmworkers)

The U.S. Bishops declared that "the primary goals of agricultural policies should be providing food for all people and reducing poverty among farmers and farmworkers in this country and abroad." *(For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food: Catholic Reflections on Food, Farmers and Farmworkers)* The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), the National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC), Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA), and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) have worked closely to support policies in the Farm Bill that support rural communities and family farms; strengthen and expand domestic anti-hunger programs; promote conservation and good stewardship of the land; ensure safe living and working conditions for farmworkers; promote fairness for farmers in developing countries; and provide food security aid efficiently and effectively to hungry people worldwide.

We talked with Maura Taylor and Maureen Jersak of Catholic Charities of Southern Missouri to discuss how the Farm Bill affects the rural population they serve daily, which includes nine of the poorest counties in the state.

What are some of the unique challenges faced by families living in rural poverty?

There are many barriers. Lack of employment opportunities and lack of affordable housing are two. Many small communities do not have a lot of affordable housing, and if they do, a significant amount is unsafe and unsanitary that is being rented in rural areas. Lack of transportation is another—when you’re trying to get to and from jobs in rural areas, if you don’t have transportation, that’s a barrier to employment and therefore a barrier to get out of poverty. There’s also growing despair with the opioid epidemic. It’s called death by despair— the lack of jobs, lack of opportunities that leads to opioid addiction and other drug use. When people hear about these challenges, some suggest for them to move where the jobs are. But many of these families don’t have the money to move, and even if they do move, they don’t have enough resources to make a life.

How is the Farm Bill important in maintaining stability for those who rely on SNAP and other food assistance programs?

Many families have to pick whether to pay for rent, food, or medicine, and if you’re not eating the right amount of food, some medicine won’t work right. When it comes to food stamps for many of these families, they can at least have their food covered so they can pay [for some of those things].

How would increased work requirements like those proposed in the House version of the Farm Bill impact those in poverty, especially rural poverty?

It’s a challenge for those living in rural poverty because the career centers are so far away from those individuals and they don’t have transportation. And if they can’t meet those work requirements, they can’t feed their families.

For more information, please visit confrontglobalpoverty.org/issues/hunger/

Food Insecurity in the United States

Food insecurity: the state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food. Missouri ranks 19th for food insecurity among the 50 states and Washington DC. Mississippi has the highest food insecurity rate of 18.7% and Hawaii has the lowest food insecurity rate of 8.7%. The food insecurity national average is 13%. Here’s how the eight states surrounding Missouri compare to the national average.

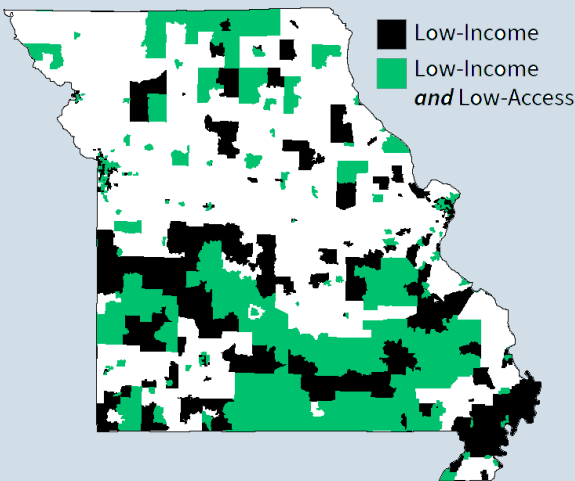
Data courtesy of USDA Economic Research Service and Missouri Community Action Network

5. Arkansas.....	17.5%
6. Kentucky.....	17.3%
9. Oklahoma.....	15.2%
13. Nebraska.....	14.7%
16. Kansas.....	14.5%
19. Missouri.....	14.2%
21. Tennessee.....	13.4%
U.S.....	13.0%
38. Illinois.....	11.1%
41. Iowa.....	10.7%

Access: Food Deserts

Areas in which nutritious food is not readily accessible are considered food deserts (green). The Food Access Atlas from USDA shows low-income census tracts where a significant number of residents is more than 1 mile (urban) or 10 miles (rural) from the nearest supermarket. Tracts with a poverty rate of 20% or higher, or tracts with a median family income less than 80% of median family income for the state or metropolitan area are shown in relation to food deserts in black.

Data and graphic courtesy of USDA Economic Research Service and Missouri Community Action Network



FARM BILL STATE OF PLAY

The U.S. House and Senate filed and passed their own versions of the 2018 Farm Bill, with the House version passing by just two votes, in a vote of 213-211 in mid-June, and the Senate passing its version in the last few days of the month by a vote of 86-11. As this *Messenger* goes to press, the House and Senate are in the process of naming members to a conference committee. It is expected that the conference committee will begin negotiations to reconcile the differences between the two bills sometime in July. Congress has until September 30 to pass a compromise Farm Bill before the current authorization expires.

For more information on action being taken on this issue, please visit the Missouri Catholic Conference website at mocatholic.org, or the Catholics Confront Global Poverty (an initiative formed by Catholic Relief Services and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) website at confrontglobalpoverty.org/issues/hunger/.

"YOU PRAY FOR THE HUNGRY. THEN YOU FEED THEM. THIS IS HOW PRAYER WORKS." POPE FRANCIS



Catholics Confront Global Poverty is an initiative of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic Relief Services. As the official voice of the Catholic Church in the U.S., we call on Catholics and our nation to defend the lives and dignity of people living in poverty worldwide, through advocacy and action.

As Catholics, we seek to encounter our neighbors at home and across the globe, to defend the dignity of those who are poor and vulnerable, to urge our nation to take action, and to transform our local and global communities. This work is rooted in prayer and worship and is part of our Baptismal call. Prayer transforms us and connects us to God and neighbor, near and far.

#NOURISHCHANGE

Use this hashtag when advocating for hunger relief through legislation on social media to join the Catholics Confront Global Poverty conversation!



Annual Assembly

FIVE YEARS OF POPE FRANCIS:

THE CHURCH AT THE
PERIPHERIES

HELIAS CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL
JEFFERSON CITY
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 6



VISIT MOCATHOLIC.ORG OR CALL 1-800-456-1679
FOR DETAILS & TO REGISTER