



Ohio Catholic Rural Life Conference

Giving Thanks for the Harvest and Planting Seeds for the 2007 Farm Bill

A reflection by the Ohio Catholic Rural Life Conference

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As we give thanks to God for the blessings of family, friends, and the food on our table, many others can be added to the list of appreciation for Thanksgiving Day. Farmers, ranchers, migrant farmworkers, and all those who work in food processing and distribution also deserve our sincere gratitude for their labor.

Our Catholic teaching says that food is a basic human right. It's the responsibility of all to protect that right. Food in our country also consists of a comprehensive system of interrelated components. When you come to think of it, social justice issues are intertwined within our nation's food system. Scripture and the parables of Jesus are replete with teachings about offering just wages, caring for the poor, valuing work, cautioning against greed and materialism, and making wise decisions, all in an agrarian setting. Today, principles of human dignity, human rights and responsibilities, family and participation in the community, dignity of work, option for the poor and vulnerable, global solidarity, and care for God's creation are important themes to consider in regards to the food system.

Lately, there's been increasing discussion about the upcoming reauthorization of the 2007 Farm Bill. Last reauthorized in 2002, the Farm Bill is an omnibus, multi-year legislation at the federal level. Most people believe the Farm Bill only deals with farm subsidies and price supports. In part, it does. However, interested parties from all different walks of life come to the table to advocate on particular aspects of this important legislation.

Conservationists are interested in the Farm Bill since the legislation supports environmental programs and other sustainable activities involving soil, water, and forests.

Business interests and those concerned with the fairness of *world trade* on issues such as foreign exports, foreign food aid, credit, and other subsidy programs are at the table.

A large share of the Farm Bill encompasses the nation's *nutrition programs* such as food stamps, emergency food assistance, WIC, commodity supplemental food program, school lunch program, and other programs that meet the needs of those living in poverty in our nation in addition to education programs on nutrition. Farm Bill nutrition programs have also been directed to areas in most need in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

The Farm Bill authorizes *credit* for existing and new farmers and funding for *rural development* in the form of grants and loans for rural businesses, marketing, regional planning, water and sewer projects, and communications such as television and internet technology.

Universities and other *research* institutions are awarded grants through the Farm Bill intended to enhance food quality, safety, and security.

In times of fluctuating energy prices and heavy reliance on petroleum, natural gas, coal, and nuclear power, the Farm Bill funds bioenergy and other forms of renewable *energy* technology intended to improve efficiency and sustainability.

The Farm Bill is large in scope and impacts rural, urban, and suburban communities, not to mention the world. In a sense, it affects us all. In the next several months, the discussions will intensify. With each topic mentioned above, interested parties have varying degrees of opinion on what's the best direction to take.

Now's the time to act as faithful citizens and join in on the discussion. In order to harvest the benefits of sound public policy that reflects the principles of our faith and meets the needs of the common good, we need to plant the seeds of awareness, establish right relationships, and be at the table as concerned producers and consumers. For Thanksgiving Day, let us all give thanks to God for the harvest; thank those who work in the food system, and plant seeds for a better tomorrow.

The Ohio Catholic Rural Life Conference is a committee of the Catholic Conference of Ohio consisting of diocesan rural life directors and representatives of each diocese. For more information on the 2007 Farm Bill and the Ohio Catholic Rural Life Conference, contact your diocesan rural life director or go online at www.ohiocathconf.org/rural.

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