

# CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF OHIO

9 E. LONG ST. SUITE 201, COLUMBUS, OHIO 43215, 614-224-7147

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## **Parched Land, Perilous Times: A Call for Prayer and Legislative Actions for Farming Families**

*Catholic Bishops of Ohio  
October 1, 1999*

The summer of 1999 will be long remembered for its severe heat and lack of rainfall. The effects particularly have hurt our agricultural communities. Field crops have been damaged. Corn and soybean yields are down. Some farmers are auctioning their livestock simply because they cannot feed them. Despite recent rains, many grazing areas have withered and water wells and springs remain dry. Hay intended to be used for winter is nearly exhausted. Many seasonal farm workers are without crops to pick, while many farm owners worry that another year of losses and low prices might force them to sell family farms. Our rural communities suffer as individual farmers and related agribusiness enterprises struggle to survive.

In these perilous times, we encourage ongoing public support for the hard working and caring individuals who derive their living from the land. These include farmers, farm family members, processors and hired laborers (many of whom come from Latin America). Today's transnational food production system places incredible risks and burdens upon these laborers, especially those living on small and moderate sized farms. Fluctuating commodity prices, weather risks, increasing production costs, and the growing market dominance by very large corporations have placed family farmers in a state of "chronic vulnerability."

We call upon all persons of good will to stand with and pray for farming families. We recommend that time be set aside for personal and communal prayer. We especially call upon our Catholic parishes to pray for farm families and to educate parishioners about farmers' lives and challenges. As we turn to God in prayer we also petition for the strength and wisdom to pursue needed remedies. May faith triumph over doubts; hope overcome despair; and compassion and justice motivate us to action.

We commend the actions of Governor Bob Taft and his administrative staff in pursuing and obtaining emergency help from the Federal government. We encourage further government help beyond low-interest loans. Many farm families already carry heavy debt burdens. Additional state and federal resources should be made available to help compensate for crop and livestock losses, as well as provide for emergency feeding needs, water assistance and tax relief. Issues of commodity pricing, labor compensation, farmland preservation, environmental safety, and retooling and marketing assistance for small and moderate size farmers should also be explored.

In our recent statement, *Life on the Land: A Call to Reflection and Action on Agriculture in Ohio*, we encourage increased public and private actions around food production issues. All of us, whether from urban, rural, or suburban settings, need to unite in finding solutions. May God help us stand in solidarity with our farming communities throughout Ohio, our nation, and our world.

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Most Rev. Daniel Pilarczyk, Archbishop of Cincinnati  
Most Rev. Carl Moeddel, Auxiliary Bishop of Cincinnati  
Most Rev. Anthony Pilla, Bishop of Cleveland  
Most Rev. Edward Pevec, Auxiliary Bishop of Cleveland  
Most Rev. James Quinn, Auxiliary Bishop Cleveland  
Most Reverend James Griffin, Bishop of Columbus  
Most Rev. Basil Schott, Byzantine Diocese of Parma

Most Rev. Gilbert Sheldon, Bishop of Steubenville  
Most Rev. James Hoffman, Bishop of Toledo  
Most Rev. Robert Donnelly, Auxiliary Bishop of Toledo  
Most Rev. Thomas Tobin, Bishop of Youngstown  
Most Rev. J. Michael Botean, Romanian Diocese of Canton  
Most Rev. Robert Moskal, Bishop of St. Josaphat ,  
Ukrainian Diocese of Parma