The Farm Bill

*The farm bill governs federal farm and food policy. It governs domestic nutrition programs and international food aid.*

Did you know that one in four Americans participate in a federal nutrition program? Because of this high rate of participation, the nation’s nutrition and farm policies absolutely need to be aligned.

Farm policy should significantly increase production of healthy foods. But farm policies alone can’t automatically improve nutrition among low-income families. Nutrition programs need to do more than provide food for hungry people; they must ensure that healthy food is available to all.

Did you know that more than half of all participants in nutrition programs are children?

Nutrition program participants are often the most vulnerable members of our society. That’s why preventing people in the United States from going hungry is the single most important objective of federal nutrition programs.

In times of high unemployment and reduced incomes, government spending on nutrition programs must increase to help people cope with these difficult economic conditions.

SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) serves as a vital lifeline for millions of Americans and federal nutrition programs protect Americans, especially children, against nutrition deficiencies.

Did you know that one-third of all child deaths around the world are attributable to malnutrition?

The number of children dying daily from malnutrition would be much higher without support from the United States, which responds directly to hunger and malnutrition in the developing world with food aid and agricultural development assistance.

U.S. food aid programs and agricultural development assistance are increasingly focused on pregnant and lactating women and children younger than 2 years of age. Even brief episodes of hunger among people in these vulnerable groups are cause for alarm.

The House and Senate are both on recess until after the November 6 elections. They are expected to return to Washington November 13.

While members of Congress finalized a stop-gap spending bill that will fund federal programs through March of 2013 they put off acting on the farm bill. After November, members of Congress will make difficult decisions about deficit reduction, particularly the $1.2 trillion in across-the-board cuts scheduled to take effect in January and the expiration of the 2001 and 2003 tax cuts.

The House and Senate passed a six-month continuing resolution (CR, temporarily funding government operations until a budget is passed) to
fund federal discretionary programs at roughly current levels, plus a 0.6% increase for the first part of the 2013 fiscal year. The CR also included a clean six-month extension of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). The negotiated CR does not alter the path of scheduled across-the-board spending cuts, or sequestration, which is still scheduled to go into effect January 2.

The House and Senate left Washington without taking action on the farm bill—a bill governing federal farm and food policy. The current farm bill is set to expire on September 30, 2012. This legislation governs domestic nutrition programs, including SNAP and international food aid programs that are vital to hungry and poor people. Leadership in both chambers have indicated that they will take action on the farm bill after the elections, during the lame duck session of Congress. The Senate continues to push for a full five-year reauthorization of the farm bill while the House is open to a temporary extension with the full bill being resolved next year.

While farm programs technically expire on September 30, harmful administrative changes (like federal farm commodity price supports reverting to 1949 law) will not go into effect right away. The 2008 farm bill covers all of 2012’s calendar year crops, allowing some wiggle room for Congress to decide how to move forward. Additionally, provisions included in the continuing resolution secure SNAP funding through next year. The last time the farm bill was allowed to expire was in 2007, when the bill expired on September and an extension was not passed until December 26.

More than 82 members have cosponsored House Resolution 760, which rejects the cuts to SNAP included in the proposed House farm bill (H.R. 6083). The resolution is non-binding, but it is an opportunity for members of Congress to show strong support for protecting SNAP by cosponsoring the resolution. We are encouraging Bread members to ask their representatives to cosponsor. (Louisiana has NO co-sponsors)

Republican Study Committee Chairman Jim Jordan (R-OH), along with Reps. Paul Broun (R-GA), Steve Chabot (R-OH), and Tim Huelskamp (R-KS), introduced a proposal to block-grant farm bill nutrition programs. Under this plan, SNAP, the Emergency Food Assistance Program, Community Food Projects, Commodity Supplemental Food Program, Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program, and the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program would be consolidated into a single block grant to the states, with funding returned to FY2008 levels. Members argue this proposal will streamline programs and give states more flexibility while cutting spending. Like other SNAP block grant proposals introduced by this Congress, this proposal will not likely become law, despite possible attempts to attach it to the farm bill in the lame duck session.

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) is facing potentially devastating cuts. Although the continuing resolution extends funding through March at levels agreed to last August in the Budget Control Act, WIC is subject to approximately 8.2% in automatic cuts on January 2 if Congress fails to come up with a deficit-reduction plan to replace the sequester. These cuts could mean a loss of benefits
for more than 700,000 low-income women and young children.

Poverty-focused foreign aid (PFFA) makes up a small part of total discretionary funding, which must be approved by Congress each year in the appropriations process. The continuing resolution funds programs at the Senate levels for FY 2013. PFFA is subject to cuts in January when sequestration is enacted. The programs would take an 8.2% cut, according to the OMB report. These cuts could mean lives lost around the world. For example, as a result of the sequester:

- 276,500 fewer people would receive HIV/AIDS treatment, potentially leading to 63,000 more AIDS-related deaths and 124,000 more children being orphaned.
- 656,000 fewer children annually will have access to quality primary school education, making their road to overcoming poverty that much harder.

The Foreign Assistance Transparency and Accountability Act (S. 3310), introduced by Senator Lugar, with support from Senator Rubio, was passed by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on September 19. The objective of this bill is to improve transparency and accountability within U.S. foreign aid by instituting a standard monitoring and evaluation requirement across all agencies that administer U.S. foreign assistance. Additionally, it calls for information garnered from the evaluations to be made public. The companion legislation is the Poe-Berman bill in the House.

The 2001 and 2003 tax cuts expire at the end of this year, and Congress is in the midst of debating which parts to extend, including the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Child Tax Credit.

Food aid is reauthorized in the farm bill process and funded in the appropriations process. Like other discretionary programs, funding is extended at Senate levels for the FY2013 budget as part of the continuing resolution. Food aid is still subject to sequester and may be cut by 8.2%, which would result in over 3 million people losing access to vital food assistance and 377,200 fewer children having access to quality primary school education.

**ACTIONS – CONTACT YOUR MEMBER OF CONGRESS AND URGE HIM TO CO-SPONSOR H.R.760**

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Published eleven times a year by
Bread for the World Louisiana
Founded in 1982
Bread for the World New Orleans
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