

# Background Information and Talking Points: Farm Bill 2023 Reauthorization

## Overview

***This document is meant to assist you in preparing to communicate with your members of Congress by providing background information on the issues you will be discussing. Talking Points for congressional meetings can be found at the end of the document.***

CRS believes that our work together in the United States is the outward expression of missionary discipleship. Together, we are called to encounter Christ in the members of our human family most in need, and to share the Good News with others, becoming prophetic advocates for justice and the common good. CRS' campaigns on hunger and climate change allow you to do just that.

As an opportunity to stand with those experiencing hunger, malnutrition and climate change, your communications and congressional meetings will focus on advocating for the 2023 Farm Bill Reauthorization. The background information and talking points below can serve as a guide for how to structure your communications and meetings with the offices of your members of Congress so that you can highlight this issue in your conversation while continuing to build a relationship with your member of Congress and their staff.

**The most important part is to reflect on how you will express why you and your community care about these issues—as well as the stories you can share with the offices you meet with about how you and your community are engaged on these issues of importance and support those most vulnerable around the world.**

## Background

From 1990 to 2014, the world made tremendous progress in reducing the amount of people suffering from hunger and malnutrition. However, in recent years, many of the important and lifesaving gains that were once achieved have now been reversed.

In 2021, the United Nations World Food Program estimates that “nearly 193 million people were in Crisis or worse, as a result of intensified conflict, significant economic shocks and some of the most severe weather extremes in recent years, or a combination of these drivers.” Conflict, climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic – all now compounded by the ripple effects of the conflict in Ukraine – continue to drive this increase in acute and chronic hunger. According to the World Food Program, the worst case scenario as a consequence of the Russian invasion of Ukraine could lead up to 323 million people into severe hunger. With the world off-track to eradicating hunger by 2030, our leaders must urgently come together to increase investments for poverty-focused assistance to meet the growing global need and ensure that all forms of assistance are flexible, evidence-based and context-specific.

As Pope Francis highlighted on World Food Day 2021, “Overcoming hunger is one of humanity’s greatest challenges.” This is why CRS pursues a multi-sectoral approach to tackling hunger and malnutrition holistically and at its root causes. Additionally, CRS continues to expand its global footprint, touching the lives of more than 140 million people in need across 115 countries worldwide in 2020. From restoring degraded lands and

providing access to microfinance for rural smallholder farmers to helping local schools establish sustainable school meals programs, providing nutrition support to new mothers and infants and improving peoples' access to clean and reliable drinking water, CRS is helping to transform lives, livelihoods and catalyze new economic opportunities for those who have been excluded and left behind. CRS is proud to continue our partnership alongside Congress and the Administration to enact timely legislation to address global hunger and support the implementation of U.S.-funded emergency and development food security programming around the world.

## What is the Farm Bill?

The Farm Bill is a multiyear package of legislation that oversees a variety of domestic and international food and agricultural programs. While the overwhelming majority of the Farm Bill covers programs in the United States, like crop insurance, forestry and domestic nutrition assistance, CRS focuses its advocacy on Title III which addresses foreign trade and international food aid programs. Programs authorized in this title include Food for Peace, Food for Progress, McGovern-Dole Food for Education and the Farmer-to-Farmer Program. Ahead of the 2023 Farm Bill, CRS will engage the House and Senate Agriculture Committees to reauthorize each of these Farm Bill programs and urge for continued investments in this vital food assistance to meet the needs of vulnerable families around the world. Additionally, CRS will help strengthen and amend provisions that improve program effectiveness and flexibility.

## The Farm Bill Process

The Farm Bill process typically begins between a year to two years before current legislation expires. The 2018 Farm Bill is set to expire on September 30, 2023. During this window of time, stakeholders interested in U.S. domestic and international agriculture, such as local farmers, NGOs, shippers and ordinary citizens, will start developing their asks and begin sharing proposals with the House and Senate Agriculture Committees. Congress performs oversight of these programs, including with hearings in Washington DC and around the country on various Farm Bill authorized programs and some stakeholders may have the opportunity to testify in a congressional hearing in front of the Agriculture Committee, or relevant subcommittees.

Thus begins the drafting process in both chambers of Congress. For most of the process, the two chambers work parallel, but independently, of each other. The House and Senate Agriculture Committees will negotiate, draft, and "markup," or amend, their bill before it passes out of committee and is considered on the chamber floor. During floor consideration, all members of both chambers will have the opportunity to debate amendments and propose alternate language until a compromise is reached within the respective chamber. The bills then move to conference, where a body of leadership-appointed House and Senate members develop a single bill that will need to be passed by both chambers of Congress, before then being signed into law by the President.

Once the Farm Bill becomes law, the U.S. departments and agencies that oversee implementation of Farm Bill-authorized programs, like the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), must prepare rules and regulations for how to carry out the provisions of the bill.

## The Ask

During this time of unprecedented and dire food insecurity in the world, we urge Congress to reauthorize and expand flexibility and/or efficiency of lifesaving international programs authorized in the 2023 Farm Bill that work towards ending hunger for the world's most marginalized and vulnerable people.

### **Reauthorize existing international programs in the 2023 Farm Bill:**

- Reauthorize Title II Food for Peace, including the ability to use the Community Development Fund for non-emergency Title II programs.



- Reauthorize McGovern-Dole Food for Education.
- Reauthorize Food for Progress.
- Reauthorize Farmer-to-Farmer.

### **Expand flexibility and/or efficiency of international programs in the 2023 Farm Bill:**

- Increase the cost efficiency and ability to respond to the different needs of communities participating in Food for Peace Title II programs and allow for increased sustainability activities and interventions. This includes a request for full flexibility of funding for Title II non-emergency resources.
- Expand local and regional procurement activities within the McGovern-Dole Food for Education program to enhance sustainability.

## **Farm Bill Programs**

### **Food for Peace (FFP)**

The Food for Peace (FFP) program is the U.S. government’s oldest food assistance program and has provided emergency and developmental support to more than 4 billion people around the world since 1954. As of 2020, the program sits within USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA), which serves as the leading U.S. government entity responding to humanitarian disasters internationally in a holistic way that links preparedness and resilience to emergency response, relief and recovery needs. BHA’s life-saving support includes food, water, shelter, emergency health care, sanitation and hygiene and essential nutrition services.

In addition to providing emergency food assistance – whether in the form of in-kind food aid sourced from U.S. farmers or through other modalities like cash, vouchers and locally-procured food, the FFP program funds long-term sustainable development projects called RFSAs, or Resilience Food Security Activities. RFSAs work holistically with communities recovering from disaster to build back their systems, reduce the impact of future shocks and promote more resilient communities.

Given its humanitarian and development dual authorities, which promote program adaptiveness and flexibility, FFP programs have helped support relief and recovery efforts associated with the secondary impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

***Where is additional flexibility needed?*** USAID does not have enough flexibility within the Title II funding to allow its programs to be tailored to the needs of each individual community. Current budget category constraints required for Title II funding make it difficult for USAID to cover the costs of quality program design and increasingly expensive emergency logistics needs at the same time as the non-emergency programs. The availability of the Community Development Fund, which is fully flexible, can help relieve some of these issues in the non-emergency programs, but there are not enough of these funds to address all the issues. Due to these constraints, USAID must still program goods from the U.S., usually food commodities, in certain programs where this may not lead to the best outcomes possible.

***What will additional flexibility achieve?*** There are three key opportunities that greater flexibility with budget constraints will lead us closer to. First, each Resilience Food Security Activity (also known as a RFSA) program would be designed to respond to the needs of the community on the ground as they change over the course of the 3-5 years. Second, international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), like CRS, will be able to use the appropriate mix of actual goods, or commodities, and cash/vouchers/etc. known as market modalities. Third, INGOs, like CRS, will be able to readily work across sectors without worrying about budget concerns limiting options in terms of how they work with the local community to address its needs. More than food or cash or vouchers are needed to help a community start to build their resilience. Ideally, funding would be available for multi-sector support activities such as creating savings groups, helping farmers improve resource management, or working with new moms on nutrition for themselves and their baby.

## McGovern-Dole Food for Education

The McGovern-Dole Food for Education program works with existing schools' meals programs in food-insecure communities globally to increase child literacy rates; improve nutritional outcomes, especially for young girls; and enhance dietary practices. A legacy of late U.S. Senators George McGovern and Bob Dole, the program reached more than 3.6 million children, women and families in 2020. Funds for McGovern-Dole supply U.S. agricultural commodities to school-age children; deliver nutrition services to pregnant and nursing mothers, infants and preschoolers; as well as provide financial and technical assistance to schools and local producers to promote programmatic sustainability by ensuring the project continues long after implementing organizations have left a community.

McGovern-Dole has been particularly effective during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that children still receive food and maintain good nutrition, even while schools were temporarily closed. The program adapted by establishing food distribution sites, in compliance with local and national COVID-19 guidelines, in which recipients received double take-home rations to prevent them from having to collect food as often. The distribution sites also provided parents with information on essential hygiene practices to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, as well as educational materials for children to continue their learning at home.

Since Fiscal Year 2020, McGovern-Dole has been combined with Local and Regional Procurement (LRP) – another Farm Bill-authorized program – to allow McGovern-Dole programs to source food locally thereby supporting sustainable connections with local agricultural producers and markets within and around communities and enhancing the dietary diversity of school meals by including local produce.

**Where is additional flexibility needed?** Local and regional procurement activities are important to ensure there is an increase in nutritious food available to students (like eggs, fruit, or leafy greens). These activities also help local schools and farms create the lasting ties needed to successfully budget for food grown in order to meet a school's needs over the course of a school year. Following a change in the 2018 Farm Bill, it has been easier to purchase food locally and regionally within an award. However, it has become more difficult to prioritize the activities that support the farmers with growing and the schools with learning to run the program. We hope to work with Congress and USDA to find a way to separately support these other activities without taking away from the current nutrition and education successes the program is achieving.

**What will additional flexibility achieve?** The push to expand LRP activities in countries that are ready to take a step forward in running their own programs means we would be better able to support the local communities and that the school feeding work will live on long past the end of a McGovern Dole award. LRP funded at this stage can drive up local supply availability and ideally lower prices. This is important because in many countries imported food is actually cheaper than domestically grown food, making it difficult for smallholder farmers to compete. LRP funding will help start to catalyze a change that will help children get school meals and help the local farmers.

## Food for Progress (FFPr)

Food for Progress (FFPr) assists low- and middle-income nations with modernizing and strengthening their agricultural sectors. The program works by donating U.S. agricultural products, or commodities, to recipient countries, selling them on the local market and then using the proceeds to fund economic, agricultural and development projects.

FFPr projects train farmers in animal and plant health, help improve farming methods, develop road and utility systems, establish cooperatives for farmers, provide microcredit, or small loans at low interest, and develop agricultural systems. Its two principal objectives are: to improve agricultural productivity and expand trade of agricultural products.



A mandatory-funded program, FFPr is currently authorized at \$40 million under the 2018 Farm Bill, in which funds are to be exclusively used for the cost of transporting products overseas by ship, also known as ocean freight costs. The program does not have a cap on the amount of commodities shipped, as the amount shipped will be determined by the cost of ocean freight transportation.

***Throughout the 2023 Farm Bill Reauthorization, CRS will continue to identify opportunities for increased flexibility/efficiency with Food for Progress.***

### **The Farmer-to-Farmer Program (F2F)**

The Farmer-to-Farmer (F2F) program provides direct technical learning, support, and expertise from U.S. volunteers to farmers, farm groups, agriculture-focused businesses and other agriculture sector institutions in low- and middle-income countries. Aligned with the Feed the Future initiative, F2F works to support inclusive agriculture sector growth, enhance development of local capacity and promote climate-smart development. Volunteer assignments address host-led priorities to expand economic growth that increases incomes and improves access to nutritious food. F2F is currently authorized at \$15 million.

The F2F program has demonstrated significant impact through high-quality services from volunteers. Volunteers help individuals and organizations build local institutions and linkages to resolve local problems.

During the last program cycle, volunteers assisted more than 1,900 host organizations to increase their annual sales by over \$414 million and raised annual incomes by \$70 million. The program leveraged \$28 million worth of volunteer time contributions to development efforts and mobilized \$40 million from assisted local host organizations. Volunteers worked directly with more than 231,000 agriculture-focused business professionals, with benefits accruing to over 30 million people. Approximately 41% of those assisted were women.

***Throughout the 2023 Farm Bill Reauthorization, CRS will continue to identify opportunities for increased flexibility/efficiency with Farmer-to-Farmer.***

### **Talking Points**

#### **Begin with gratitude**

*Thank you for your time to discuss the reauthorization and increased flexibility of the 2023 Farm Bill. We look forward to discuss the international programming authorized in the Farm Bill.*

→ **Express gratitude** for FY22 appropriations or check your member of Congress' website and thank them for something they have done in the recent past.

#### **Introduction: Who you are and why you're there**

*As people of faith seeking justice and care for all in our world, we believe there is a moral obligation to provide assistance and address the root causes of poverty, hunger and climate change.*

→ **Share a little about yourself/the group** and your work in the state/district before sharing your connection to CRS.

→ **Share a personal story** of why you/your group support international humanitarian and development work, to illustrate your concern about our human family around the world and these global issues.

#### **Moving to the issue: Set the stage for the conversation**

*One of the ways to ensure that U.S. funding for international humanitarian and development work reaches vulnerable communities as effectively and efficiently as possible is by continuing to authorize and improve international programming in the 2023 Farm Bill.*

→ **Share a story about the importance and impact of these programs overseas.**

Consider including details from this background document, CRS National Chapter & Club Calls (i.e., [April-June 2022 recordings](#)) or CRS stories (i.e., [Maria Ana's story](#) on McGovern-Dole Food for Education or the [Rasoanandrasana family's story](#) on Title II Food for Peace).

**→ Prepare and share about your community's connection to these programs and speak to priority areas that your member of Congress may have related to these international Farm Bill programs.**

For example, discuss how these programs are potentially an asset to local farmers in their district or state since the sourcing that the commodities in these programs are being grown by local farmers in the United States.

### **The Ask:**

*During this time of unprecedented and dire food insecurity in the world, we urge Congress to reauthorize and expand flexibility and/or efficiency of the lifesaving international programs authorized in the 2023 Farm Bill that work towards ending hunger for the world's most marginalized and vulnerable people.*

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#### **Expand flexibility and/or efficiency of international programs in the 2023 Farm Bill:**

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- Expand local and regional procurement activities in the McGovern-Dole Food for Education program to enhance sustainability.

### **Questions/Comments to Raise**

1. If the Senator/Representative travels abroad, please let us know if he/she would like to visit CRS programming in the future. As you know, we are in 114 countries around the world and would welcome an opportunity to show the Senator/Representative the impact US dollars have on the ground.
2. Please see CRS and me as a resource both in Washington, DC and back home in the state/district. Express an interest in continuing to dialogue with the Senator/Representative, or his/her staff, on these and other issues of mutual interest.

*Updated: June 1, 2022*

