2023 Farm Bill Reauthorization

AUGUST RECESS 2022: Congressional Send Ahead

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has played an instrumental role in partnering with the U.S. government to enact important reforms to U.S. food assistance programs. A critical vehicle for change has been through the Farm Bill process – most recently the 2018 Farm Bill – in which CRS has engaged House and Senate Agriculture Committee members on policy proposals to improve the impact and efficiency of programs CRS implements. As Congress embarks on the 2023 Farm Bill drafting process, CRS asks for the following for food aid reform created in partnership with InterAction, the largest alliance of poverty-focused INGOs working in the US:

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 to increase their sustainability. This could include full flexibility of funding for Title II non-emergency resources.
- Expand local and regional procurement activities in the McGovern-Dole Food for Education program to enhance sustainability.

Background Information on the International Programs authorized by the Farm Bill

Title II Food for Peace

Food for Peace (FFP) programs provide emergency and development food assistance to combat hunger and malnutrition worldwide. Emergency food assistance is delivered primarily to communities affected by recurrent crises such as climate variability, violent conflict, extreme weather disasters, and chronic food insecurity. Development food assistance complements emergency food assistance, working where communities require agricultural system strengthening, improved nutrition services, livelihood diversification, and integrated adaptation approaches to effectively build resilience to unanticipated and recurrent shocks.

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 International Food For Education and Local and Regional Procurement (LRP)
The McGovern-Dole International Food for Education program provides U.S. agricultural commodities and financial and technical assistance to food-insecure countries to establish school feeding programs. The program improves child nutrition, maternal health, and access to quality education. It promotes literacy through support for teachers and libraries, school improvement, and faculty and administrator training. The Local and Regional Procurement (LRP) program enables the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to procure local and regional commodities for field-based projects. It complements existing food aid programs, fills in the nutritional and food aid gaps created by unexpected emergencies, and stimulates local markets by supporting livelihoods.

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
Under the Food for Progress program, USDA donates U.S. agricultural commodities to international organizations, NGOs, foreign governments, or private entities, which can then distribute the commodities to beneficiaries or monetize the commodities by selling them locally to raise funds for development projects. Food for Progress projects focus on improving agricultural productivity and expanding agricultural trade.

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.