

Background Information and Talking Points: Fiscal Year 2024 Appropriations and the Farm Bill

CRS National Gathering Hill Day, June 2023

OVERVIEW

The background information and talking points in this document serve as a guide for how to structure your meetings with your members of Congress.

Our work together in the United States is the outward expression of missionary discipleship. We are called to encounter Christ in the members of our global family most in need and to share the Good News with others—becoming prophetic advocates for justice and the common good. We are grateful for your partnership in building a more just world. By advocating for holistic solutions that address the root causes of poverty, we can ensure that all people may live with dignity and thrive.

As an opportunity to stand with people experiencing hunger and the impact of climate change, your congressional meetings will focus on advocating for international development and humanitarian assistance in the fiscal year 2024 federal budget; and reauthorizing and strengthening international programs within the 2023 Farm Bill.

BACKGROUND

According to the United Nations World Food Program, 345 million people are experiencing crisis or worse levels of acute food insecurity and malnutrition—a magnitude of hunger that our world has not seen before. Families are struggling to meet their food needs due to the compound effects of conflict, climate change, COVID-19 and rising food costs. Inflation of food prices has put people under tremendous strain, while supply chain interruptions have impeded humanitarian operations and disrupted local and regional markets around the world. The rising costs of food, fertilizer and fuel make it difficult for individuals to build sustainable livelihoods, secure a steady income or feed their family with nutritious food.

Climate change continues to be an urgent challenge for our world today and especially affects communities experiencing poverty. Many of these communities live in low-lying coastal zones, dry arid regions or flood-prone areas, making them more susceptible to the impacts of droughts and flooding. Severe climate events devastate homes and communities, disrupt livelihoods and cause economic instability and inequality. The World Bank estimates that over the next 10 years, as many as 130 million people will fall into extreme poverty levels from the impacts of climate change. People contributing the least to climate change are experiencing the greatest harm.

The global food crisis and the impacts of a changing climate are disrupting the efforts of communities who have been working hard to lift themselves out of poverty. Instead of being able to thrive, they are fighting merely to survive. We must act together to support people who are most vulnerable and to find sustainable solutions that help us better care for God's creation and each other as one planet and one family.

LEGISLATIVE ISSUES

Fiscal Year 2024 Appropriations

During the appropriations process each year, Congress negotiates how to spend U.S. taxpayer dollars. Less than 1% of the \$6.2 trillion in annual federal spending went to foreign assistance last year. Just *half* of that 1% is directed toward poverty-reducing humanitarian and development aid. Through the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, organizations such as CRS partner with the U.S. government to implement programming funded by the U.S. Congress. While foreign assistance has traditionally received strong bipartisan support—as seen in fiscal year 2023 funding levels—protecting and increasing funding for these lifesaving accounts is not possible without the diligent work of constituents who call on Congress to prioritize this funding.

State of Play

The administration released its fiscal year 2024 budget proposal in March 2023. Throughout the spring and summer, the House and Senate will draft and negotiate appropriations bills. Congress will have until the end of September to introduce and pass fiscal year 2024 appropriations measures. Given ongoing debates in Washington over the debt and deficit, we expect Congress will have to pass a Continuing Resolution in September, which will fund the government temporarily at current levels into the next fiscal year. Until Congress finalizes fiscal year 2024 appropriations, CRS will continue to advocate on our priority accounts to ensure the U.S. government provides robust assistance to alleviate suffering and eliminate poverty.

The Farm Bill

The Farm Bill is a multiyear package of legislation that oversees a variety of domestic and international food and agricultural programs. 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 **Farmer-to-Farmer**.

State of Play

The current Farm Bill is set to expire on September 30, 2023. In anticipation of the 2023 reauthorization, CRS and its supporters have been engaging with legislators since early 2022, especially with members of the House and Senate Agriculture Committees. This work has focused on educating and informing them about the importance of international food assistance programs in the Farm Bill and the need to strengthen and improve these programs for efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability.

Throughout the spring and summer, stakeholders interested in U.S. domestic and international agriculture are sharing their Farm Bill-related priorities with the House and Senate Agriculture Committees. Simultaneously, Congress is performing oversight of these programs with hearings in Washington, D.C. and around the country on various Farm Bill authorized programs. While these hearings and listening sessions take place, legislators will begin preparations to draft the text of the new Farm Bill in both chambers of Congress. Part of this preparation phase includes the development of marker bills, which are introduced into Congress as a way of gathering support for a specific policy issue but don't become law as standalone bills. This allows members to build or demonstrate support for including key programs and issues in the final Farm Bill. Throughout the summer, these marker bills—as well as ongoing discussions with constituents and across Congress—will help shape the newly written Farm Bill. After the legislation has been negotiated and a final bill is passed by both chambers of Congress, it will then be signed into law by the president.

Farm Bill Programs

Title II Food for Peace (FFP)

For more than 65 years, the Food for Peace program has provided food assistance to people in need around the world. In an emergency, FFP delivers U.S.-sourced agricultural commodities as well as market-based assistance and locally procured food to people facing crises.

In addition to responding to disasters when they strike, FFP works with communities that are susceptible to recurrent shocks to improve and sustain their food and nutrition security through non-emergency programs called Resilience Food Security Activities (RFSAs). These are unique, multi-year programs that build on emergency food security interventions to strengthen the resilience of people, communities, countries and systems in a way that reduces chronic vulnerability and facilitates inclusive growth.

Where is improvement needed? Technical changes to the legislation could have profound and transformational impacts on the future of U.S. food assistance, while maintaining the U.S.' legacy as the leading donor of humanitarian food assistance. To do this, Congress can:

- Make U.S. commodities in non-emergency programs a programming option—rather than a requirement—so that implementing partners can tailor support to the specific needs of any given community.
- Ensure FFP would continue to provide U.S.-sourced commodities through Title II emergency programs and maintain the ability to program commodities in non-emergency programs where appropriate. This will allow implementing partners, like CRS, to design non-emergency programs with the intent of helping communities build resilience in alignment with the objectives of the FFP program.
- Establish a single associated cost category to combine the authorizations under Section 202(e) and ITSH of the Food for Peace Act. ITSH covers all expenses associated with in-country shipping and handling, and 202(e) covers funds needed for programming and market-based assistance. This maintains congressional oversight of funds while streamlining budgeting and lessening the administrative burden for implementing organizations.

What will these changes achieve? These changes will help achieve three outcomes. First, RFSA programs would be designed to respond to the needs of the community as they change throughout the duration of the program. For example, as a community becomes more self-sufficient in providing for themselves, they would require less in-kind aid and more assistance with capacity building and resilience strengthening.

Second, organizations like CRS that implement FFP programming will be able to use the appropriate mix of market modalities—such as food commodities, cash and vouchers—in a way that addresses a community's specific needs.

Third, organizations like CRS will be able to more easily work across sectors to support communities through a more holistic approach, leading to greater self-sufficiency. This includes helping families access nutritious food, build sustainable livelihoods and receive resilience and disaster preparedness training. In addition to providing food or vouchers, these changes allow organizations like CRS to further address the root causes of hunger through activities such as creating savings groups, training farmers on resource management and working with new moms to improve nutrition for themselves and their babies.

McGovern-Dole Food for Education

The McGovern-Dole Food for Education program works with existing school meal programs in food-insecure communities around the world to increase child literacy rates, improve nutritional outcomes—especially for young girls—and enhance dietary practices. Funds for McGovern-Dole also provide nutrition services to

pregnant and nursing mothers, infants and preschoolers, and they provide financial and technical assistance to schools and local producers to build sustainable programs within the community.

A change in the 2018 Farm Bill required the USDA to allocate 10% of McGovern-Dole funding toward a Local and Regional Procurement (LRP) component that allows program implementors—like CRS—to supplement U.S. in-kind commodities with locally sourced food. This change helps support local farmers, markets and economies, improves the capacity and sustainability of communities to provide for themselves, and can enhance the dietary diversity of school meals by including culturally appropriate produce.

Where is additional support needed? CRS seeks to ensure that school meal programs continue beyond the life cycle of an award without taking away from the program’s efforts to achieve nutrition and education successes. To do this, Congress can:

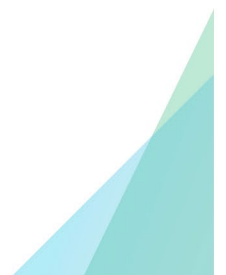
- Increase the amount set aside for LRP activities within the McGovern-Dole Food for Education program to enable programming that better supports local farmers within the community or region, without taking away from the efforts toward nutrition, literacy and education.
- Incorporate capacity-building support to farmers in the LRP component.

What will additional support achieve? LRP activities ensure local nutritious food is available to students, help schools and farms form strong relationships, and provide them with the capacity building and planning support to continue their program long after the end of a McGovern-Dole award.

Expanding LRP will support local communities in building sustainable and long-lasting school feeding programs and increase the amount of food that can be purchased from local farmers, helping them to scale their businesses and become reliable suppliers for schools long into the future.

Investments in LRP engage local actors as equal partners in holistic and meaningful ways to strengthen capacity, facilitate decision-making, develop their own solutions and mobilize local resources to support sustainable and transformative outcomes.

Note: If your senator(s) are members of the Agriculture Committee, they will receive a nuanced Farm Bill ask related to the **McGovern-Dole marker bill**. A marker bill is a piece of legislation that is introduced into Congress as a way of gathering support for a specific policy issue but doesn’t become law as a standalone bill. The goal of a marker bill is inclusion as part of a larger package of legislation, such as the Farm Bill.



TALKING POINTS

Framing

Begin with gratitude

Thank you for your time to allow us to get to know each other and discuss international development and humanitarian assistance.

Express gratitude for their service in Congress or check their website to 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. Global food insecurity and the impacts of climate change are two of the most pressing issues of our time, and they disproportionately affect people experiencing poverty and vulnerability.

Share about yourself/the group, your work in the state/district and your connection to CRS. Share your personal story of why you support CRS' international humanitarian and development work, including your concern about our human family and why global issues like hunger and climate change matter to you.

Moving to the issues: Set the stage for the conversation

The United States government has the responsibility and capacity to address the needs of people around the world experiencing poverty and vulnerability—to prevent hunger and to provide necessary assistance in adapting to the world's changing climate. U.S. leadership is critical in our collective effort to address the root causes of poverty.

Share a story about the importance and impact of CRS' programs around the world. Consider including details from this background document or using stories found at crs.org/act.

The Ask

Add the ask(s) specific to the member of Congress you are meeting with—see the Legislative Asks section on the following page for details.

Discussion

Questions to Ask/Comments to Raise

- How does the senator/representative plan to approach international development and humanitarian assistance programs?
- What can I do, as a constituent, to continue to advance these important issues with the senator/representative?
- If the senator/representative travels abroad, would he/she like to visit CRS programming in the future? CRS works in more than 100 countries around the world and would welcome an opportunity to show the senator/representative the impact U.S. investments in foreign assistance have on the ground.
- Please let the senator/representative know that I—along with CRS—can serve as a resource both in Washington, D.C. and back home in their state/district. I am interested in continuing to dialogue with them—or their staff—on these and other issues of mutual interest.

LEGISLATIVE ASKS

House Asks—Use these asks when meeting with your representative.

1. FY24 Appropriations:

I ask that you oppose proposed cuts to international humanitarian aid and development funding in fiscal year 2024 appropriations and that you contact Appropriations and House leadership to express your support for robust funding for international poverty-reducing budget lines in this chart (share CRS' appropriations chart), especially those that address the impacts of hunger and climate change on the world's most vulnerable people.

Note: If your representative is part of Appropriations or House leadership, please adjust the language in the ask to reflect what is most appropriate for your member.

2. Farm Bill:

I ask that you contact the Chairmen and Ranking Members of the House Agriculture Committee—Reps. Glenn “GT” Thompson and David Scott—and of the subcommittee on Nutrition, Foreign Agriculture and Horticulture—Reps. Brad Finstad and Jahana Hayes—to express your support for reauthorizing international food aid programs in the Farm Bill and strengthening them by prioritizing the following:

- Increasing flexibility for non-emergency Title II Food for Peace development programming by:
 - Making U.S. commodities in non-emergency programs a programming option—rather than a requirement—to allow implementing partners to tailor activities specifically to the needs of the community and;
 - Combining the authorizations under Section 202I and ITSH of the Food for Peace Act, thereby maintaining congressional oversight of funds while streamlining budgeting and lessening the administrative burden for implementing partners.
- Increasing the amount of funding set aside for Local and Regional Procurement within the McGovern-Dole Food for Education program to enable programming that better supports local farmers regionally and within communities. Additionally, capacity-building support for farmers should be incorporated into the Local Regional Procurement component of McGovern-Dole.

Note: If one of the members mentioned is your representative—Reps. Thompson, Scott, Finstad or Hayes—please adjust the language in the ask to reflect what is most appropriate for your member.

Senate Asks—Use the first ask when meeting with your senators. If the senator is a member of the Agriculture Committee, include the second ask as well.

1. FY24 Appropriations (all senators):

I ask that you contact Appropriations and Senate leadership to express support for robust funding for poverty-reducing budget lines in fiscal year 2024 appropriations outlined in this chart (share CRS' appropriations chart), especially those that address the impacts of hunger and climate change on the world's most vulnerable people.

Note: If your senator is part of Appropriations or Senate leadership, please adjust the language in the ask to reflect what is most appropriate for your member.

2. Farm Bill (only for Senate Agriculture Committee members):

Democrat senators: Please reach out to Sen. Cory Booker to express your support for increasing Local and Regional Procurement in McGovern-Dole from 10% to a range of 10-20%.

Republican senators: Please consider joining Sen. Cory Booker on the McGovern-Dole marker bill request to increase Local and Regional Procurement in McGovern-Dole from 10% to a range of 10-20%.

Sen. Cory Booker: Thank you for your leadership in striving to improve the McGovern-Dole Food for Education program through increasing Local and Regional Procurement from 10% to a range of 10-20%. We look forward to the bill being introduced and are ready to support your efforts.

