

The Farm Bill

The Farm Bill is a large and complex package of legislation that United States (U.S.) Congress revises every 5 years. Although it is called the farm bill, the legislation actually affects much more than just our nation's farms.

The bill regulates all of the following areas:

- **Food Assistance**
- **Rural Development**
- **Agricultural Trade**
- **Farm Support**
- **Land Conservation**



How each of these areas relates to vulnerable populations in the U.S.:

- The **food assistance** part of the bill has a tremendous impact on feeding programs including SNAP (food stamps), food for food banks and pantries, and grants for local feeding and anti-hunger programs.
- **Rural development** provides assistance to rural communities to increase services and economic diversity for its residents.
- **Trade policies** set regulations for American agricultural trade globally, including emergency aid to foreign countries.
- **Farm support** supplies loans to new farmers, commodities payments and subsidies, and disaster insurance.
- **Land conservation** includes funding for the US forestry, and efforts to conserve natural resources.

Domestic Concerns

The farm bill shapes many policies concerning vulnerable populations in the U.S. The Food Assistance aspect is particularly important, as currently 40 million people are participating in SNAP (food stamp) programs nation-wide. It is important to review and encourage strong support of feeding programs to decrease domestic hunger.

Just as important as access to food, the quality of food our nation eats is affected by the

"If you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday."

- Isaiah 58:10

farm bill. Our current food system consists of mostly unsustainable industrial farms. Independent small and medium family farms receive little support, as do organic or sustainable model farms. As a result crops such as rice, wheat, soy, and corn are heavily subsidized, and are the cheapest goods available. These grains are sold cheaply to food processing companies that make them into unhealthy, convenience food like soda and chips sold at most grocery stores. But healthy food is still expensive. This policy creates a system where poor people cannot afford healthy food, but only cheap processed foods.



Global Concerns

The Farm Bill also greatly affects international farmers. Through national policies that are designed to protect American farmers from volatile weather and other investment risks, the government currently subsidizes farmers to guarantee they continue to produce. This leads to overproduction of many crops that are then dumped onto the global market place as surplus. These crops are grown in massive quantities that are cheaper, and because of this are sold at cheaper prices. Cheaper prices for American products then bring down or depress the

prices on the world market for goods like cotton. This is damaging to small-scale farmers in developing countries that cannot get government assistance.

Food and Faith

As people of faith, we commonly bow our heads and thank God before every meal. Every step of the process from seed to plate is a process that God blesses through sunlight, nutrients, water, and soil. (Psalm 65: 9-13) And during the last supper, Jesus chose a loaf of bread and a glass of wine to signify his presence with us as the "bread of life." (John 6:26) Therefore, eating is a holy sacrament that can use to honor God's earth, the food God provides for us, and all of God's people working to provide it.

Hunger and poverty are realities that need not be – our policies and way of living reinforce them. Therefore, we can make changes. We can change our policies to ensure we do not endorse a system that prevents people from feeding their families. The Bible calls for us to review our food and agriculture policies as people of faith to make sure they create sustainable production. Policies of food should work to create a way for all people to feed themselves a balanced and healthy diet.

"We cannot retreat from the world... We must become aware of the rampant injustice and subtle hidden violence in today's world, examine our own involvement... We look toward a future that will be more...just, and respectful of God's creation." - 1991 Statement, Peacemaking: The Calling of God's People in History

Steps You Can Take:

- Continue to read about the Farm Bill
- Advocate on behalf of low-income people; talk to your Representatives in Congress hunger and poverty issues in the farm bill
- Celebrate Bread for the World Sunday in your congregation
- Get involved with domestic hunger issues at:
www.fightingpovertywithfaith.com
- Join Brethren Volunteer Service and devote a year of service to alleviating hunger
- Participate in a CROP walk with Church World Service

For more information on these programs and others visit www.brethren.org/peace or email Jordan Blevins at jblevins@brethren.org.