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Faith Leaders Applaud Senate's Bipartisan Farm Bill

Strong nutrition title will help alleviate hunger for millions of Americans

June 13, 2018 (Washington, D.C) – Today, multi-faith leaders voiced strong support for the Senate Agriculture Committee's bipartisan farm bill. Building off of the last farm bill, this version improves program integrity for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which helps more than 40 million Americans put food on the table. The bill also strengthens pilot programs and connects more SNAP recipients with workforce development opportunities.

The faith leaders are members of the Interreligious Working Group on Domestic Human Needs (DHN). DHN is a broad coalition of religious organizations and faith traditions working together to advance federal policies that will help eliminate the root causes of poverty and enable individuals to live with dignity, ensuring a secure future for themselves and their families.

DHN members stand united in their stance on protecting SNAP from cuts or harmful changes in the farm bill. Following are quotes from leaders in this group:

Rev. David Beckmann, President, Bread for the World: “As Christians, we experience the love of God for all people through Jesus Christ and are moved to help and defend people living in hunger and poverty. This is why we are grateful to the Senate Agriculture Committee for their continued bipartisan support of U.S. international food assistance programs, both for emergency relief and long-term development. We are also thankful the committee rejected the broad, sweeping cuts to domestic nutrition assistance that would harm kids, families, the elderly, people with disabilities, and hard-working individuals. While the economy is getting better for some, millions of families are still not able to make ends meet. We thank Chairman Roberts, Ranking Member Stabenow and their staff for working together to draft a bipartisan farm bill. The Scriptures speak to the responsibility of kings and other public leaders in protecting and helping poor and vulnerable people. We hope the House will follow the Senate's lead and draft a bipartisan bill that will help end hunger in the U.S. and around the world.”

Rev. Ebony J. Grison, Director, Ecumenical Poverty Initiative: “Ecumenical Poverty Initiative (EPI) applauds the Senate Agriculture Committee and its leadership, Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow, for crafting a bipartisan Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 that addresses policies while attending to the nation's poor. Over forty million people, including women, children, seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities, depend on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Our faith moves us to advocate for and with our brothers and sisters. EPI is heartened by the compromises that defend SNAP in the Farm Bill and could improve our neighbors' health; even as we work and pray for the day that hunger and poverty in this country are eradicated.”

Rev. Amy E. Reumann, Director, Advocacy, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA): “ELCA Advocacy appreciates the bipartisan leadership of Senator Roberts and Senator Stabenow in producing a Farm Bill that invests in and improves food programs which address hunger in the US and overseas. We are thankful for the attention the Agriculture Committee has given to strengthening the Food for Peace and McGovern-Dole Food for Education programs, and for removing the requirement to monetize commodities. We support the care the Senate is showing for rural communities by ensuring a strong safety net for farmers that also helps them to care for God’s good creation.”

Diane Randall, Executive Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation: “It is a moral imperative that no one in our country should go hungry. We applaud the Senate Agriculture Committee for producing a strong, bipartisan farm bill that protects and supports the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to help individuals and families struggling to put food on the table. SNAP is effective, efficient, and prevents hunger for millions of Americans. The Senate bill builds upon SNAP’s success by improving program integrity, expanding pilot programs for underserved populations, and better connecting SNAP recipients with effective workforce development opportunities. As the legislative process moves forward, we urge the Senate to maintain the bipartisan cooperation that voters across our country long for and to maintain strong support of SNAP. We call on the House to follow the Senate’s example.”

Colin Christopher, Director, Office for Interfaith and Community Alliances, Islamic Society of North America: “As the final days of Ramadan wind down, I am reminded that although my intentional fasts will soon end, the fasts that millions of Americans endure on a daily basis because of hunger, will continue. Funding for SNAP needs to increase so that no one in this wealthy nation of ours goes hungry. Few other government programs are more effective in lifting people out of poverty. We call on Senate leaders to stand strong, honor the bipartisan history of support for SNAP, and ensure that the Farm Bill reflects the values of compassion and mercy that underlie the eternal love God has for all of us.”

William Daroff, Senior Vice President for Public Policy and Director of the Washington Office for The Jewish Federations of North America: “The Jewish Federations of North America’s network of thousands of hospitals, aging and assisted living facilities, group homes, family service agencies and vocational training programs, community centers and camps recognize the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a critical first line of defense against hunger for millions of low-income Americans. We are grateful to Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Pat Roberts (R-KS) and Ranking Member Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) for crafting the bipartisan Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, also known as the Farm Bill. For more than four decades, SNAP has enjoyed strong bipartisan support. With the program under attack in the House, this new bill is proof that opposing parties can balance their differences to ensure more than 40 million Americans will not go hungry. We look forward to working with the Committee to further strengthen SNAP and ensure that the vulnerable populations we serve are able to access the assistance they need.”

Abby Leibman, President & CEO, Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger: “By rejecting ideological thinking and working together, Senators Roberts and Stabenow have effectively balanced the needs and priorities of all those who are impacted by the Farm Bill, including more than 40 million American men, women, and children who need help putting food on the table. In preventing harmful changes to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), they recognize what we know to be true: SNAP is a program that works, and indiscriminate changes like those proposed in the House version of the bill will bring real harm to real people.”

Lawrence E. Couch, Director, National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd: “As Senators prepare to take up the Senate’s bipartisan Farm Bill, I pray that they leave the draconian House version in the dustbin. I urge the Senate to avoid amendments that would harm SNAP recipients or limit their access to nutritious food for themselves and their families. SNAP is not the goal; it is the path to the goal. We need to keep the path free and clear so that those not as successful as ourselves have a way forward and do not

go hungry. No person in the United States of America should ever go hungry, especially when we have the means to prevent it. And this includes everyone within our borders. Immigrant children, including undocumented children, must not be excluded from SNAP.”

Nancy K. Kaufman, CEO, National Council of Jewish Women: “The National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) believes each of us is made in the image of G-d — B’tselem Elohim (Genesis 1:26). Thus, we believe in the inherent dignity of each person and the obligation to care for one another. Such obligation includes caring for the most vulnerable in this country by ensuring nutrition assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). SNAP is the nation’s most critical anti-hunger program, supporting 41 million working families, seniors, children, and individuals with disabilities. We urge lawmakers to support a bipartisan farm bill that protects and strengthens nutrition assistance programs in the US, and oppose work requirements and eligibility limits for the program that would result in the elimination of coverage for millions of SNAP households. NCJW will continue to resist such punitive measures, instead working to ensure the promise of the American dream is a reality for those in greatest need.”

Sister Simone Campbell, SSS, Executive Director, NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice: “While negotiations still face multiple political hurdles, I am encouraged to see Senator Roberts and Senator Stabenow work together to produce a bipartisan Farm Bill. The bill seems to meet the needs of both the agriculture community and people experiencing food insecurity. Moving forward, it is imperative to keep intact the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. The Catholic Sisters and activists of NETWORK will continue to monitor the process for any attempts at derailment.”

Afif Rahman, Executive Director, Poligon Education Fund: “Poligon applauds the effort that Senators Roberts and Stabenow have led to draft a bipartisan Farm Bill that refuses to introduce punishing work requirements for those in dire need and intends to keep funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) intact. We hope that members of Congress continue to work across the aisle to pass a Farm Bill that does not hold food ransom from millions of hungry Americans and stop shamelessly exploiting vulnerable communities as bargaining chips to play partisan political games. While it is a tragedy that our wealthy nation does fail to meet the basic human needs of all Americans, SNAP is a tremendously effective anti-poverty and anti-hunger program and must be protected. In the holy month of Ramadan, we are reminded of our duty to serve and empower those less fortunate, and we hope that the Farm Bill reflects these universal values of compassion and service.”

Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner, Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism: “The Senate is rightly maintaining the bipartisan tradition of protecting SNAP in the Farm Bill. This bill seeks to protect access to SNAP for those most in need, aligning with the Jewish mandate to “share your bread with the hungry” (Isaiah 58:7). We look forward to working with our coalition allies and Congress to support this approach and reject the House’s damaging proposal.”

Sandy Sorensen, Director, United Church of Christ, Washington DC Office: “In choosing to embrace bipartisanship and a spirit of cooperation the Senate version of the farm bill addresses the needs of the many who rely on its programs. Notably the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), a crucial program that millions of Americans rely on for nutrition assistance, remains intact and without the many harmful provisions of the House farm bill. Any farm bill that moves forward must protect access to food assistance for the vulnerable and reject the cruel and unnecessary changes to work requirements and eligibility contained in the House bill. We remain hopeful that the Senate bill and the work of Senator Roberts and Senator Stabenow will serve as the path moving forward for farm bill negotiations.”

Rev. Jason Carson Wilson, Founding Executive Director, Bayard Rustin Liberation Initiative:
“No child or family—well, actually, no people—should face a day without a food. That was a reality that this faith leader has faced. Experience, sacred text and my conscience compel me to make sure no one worries about their next meal. Burdening SNAP recipients with more stringent and, frankly, unnecessary eligibility and work requirements could keep food off their tables. My sacred text and conscience tells me that I’m my siblings’ keeper. Siblings in need shouldn’t be denied vital resources. I’m grateful for Sens. Stabenow and Roberts’ bipartisan efforts to produce a Farm Bill. In the name of Jesus, who fed the 5,000, I urge Senate lawmakers to put forward a Farm Bill that doesn’t privilege stringent work and eligibility requirements over feeding the hungry. That’s not what Jesus would do.”

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