

News Release



Bread for the World

Seeking Justice. Ending Hunger.

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Religious Leaders Push Pennsylvania Senators for Equity in the Farm Bill

WASHINGTON – Thirty-two bishops and other religious leaders in Pennsylvania have signed letters to **Senators Robert Casey, Jr., and Arlen Specter**, urging them to work for equity in the farm bill when the Senate takes up the legislation this month. Bishops and clergy who signed the letter represent regional offices of such theologically diverse faith communions as the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Church of the Brethren, Moravian Church, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and United Church of Christ.

Hand delivered on October 3, the letters signed by Pennsylvania faith leaders are part of efforts by a national religious coalition, led by the anti-hunger organization Bread for the World, advocating for changes to the farm bill that would provide more equitable support to farmers of modest means and help make progress against hunger and poverty in the United States and around the world.

“It is an injustice to give priority to special interests rather than meet the most pressing needs in rural America or do what we can to reduce hunger,” said **Larry Hollar, Bread for the World’s Regional Organizer for Pennsylvania**. “Our nation’s farm policy must help those who need it the most—farmers of modest means, struggling rural communities and hungry people who are working to lift their families out of poverty.”

The farm bill passed by the House of Representatives in July included significant increases for nutrition and conservation programs, but failed to reform the current system of commodity payments. The Senate Agriculture Committee is expected to take up the farm bill in early October. **Senator Robert Casey, Jr.**, is a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee and sits on the Subcommittee on Nutrition and Food Assistance, Sustainable and Organic Agriculture, and General Legislation.

“Senators Casey and Specter should do everything in their power to ensure that the 2007 farm bill expands nutrition programs, encourages good stewardship of creation and levels the playing field for farmers in poor countries,” said **Reverend Gary Harke, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Council of Churches**.

“We need less hunger and poverty, not more commodity payments to the wealthiest farms. We need fairness in the farm bill, not the status quo. Our state, our country and the world will be better off when we shift our nation’s resources to help people earn a sufficient, sustainable livelihood and provide for their families.”

The text of the letter to Senators Casey and Specter, and names of signees follows:

In the weeks ahead the Senate begins work on the farm bill. As faith leaders in our respective traditions, we see this bill as an important moral statement of priorities for our nation and world. The farm bill offers the opportunity to:

- begin the transition to a more effective and equitable system of support for U.S. farmers, reducing payments to those who need them least and strengthening help to those who need it most, especially socially disadvantaged farmers;
- strengthen and expand our nation's nutrition programs, including the Food Stamp Program;
- enhance our rural communities, targeting especially those with the greatest need and promoting rural entrepreneurs and small business development;
- improve programs to conserve God's creation, including those that focus on working farms; and
- enact policies that help enable farmers in developing nations to make a living and meet U.S. commitments to international trade requirements.

The current system of commodity payments disproportionately helps relatively wealthy, large-scale farmers of particular crops (corn, soybeans, wheat, rice, and cotton) while offering little or no support for a broad range of farmers of modest means who do not produce one of these crops. It provides payments for farmers even when times are good rather than focusing on a strong safety net to sustain revenues and well-being as farmers cope with difficult times. A more equitable system of support that targets help to struggling farmers in this country would save money—savings that could be used to strengthen the Food Stamp and other nutrition programs and provide more funds for effective rural development and conservation, all of which are needed in our state.

Improvements to our nation's farm payment policies would avoid payments that exert downward pressure on already low crop prices. These changes would assist small and moderate size farms at home and help farmers abroad who struggle to gain a foothold and compete in their own markets because of the impact of the current U.S. commodity payment system.

Our faith sees those who live nearby and far away as neighbors for whom we care and with whom we work for a better world. A farm bill that does more to support the aspirations of farmers and rural communities in Pennsylvania, throughout our country, and in the world would provide a stronger moral framework than the current farm bill has provided.

The Senate will soon have an opportunity to improve on the farm bill the House of Representatives recently passed and to truly create a more equitable and sustainable farm policy for the years ahead. Please do everything in your power to ensure that the Senate's version of the farm bill reforms farm commodity payments to provide more fairness to struggling family farmers here in the U.S. and in the poorest parts of the world.

We pray that you and other members of the Senate will consider our request during the farm bill deliberations this fall.

In peace,

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Nathan D. Baxter, Bishop
Episcopal Diocese of Central Pennsylvania
Harrisburg

Charles E. Bennison, Jr., Bishop Diocesan
Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia

The Rev. Claire S. Burkat, Bishop
Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)
Norristown

The Rev. Dr. W. Darwin Collins, Regional Minister and President
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Pennsylvania
New Stanton

The Rev. Dr. Marja L. Coons-Torn, Conference Minister
Penn Central Conference, United Church of Christ
Harrisburg

The Rev. Joe A. Detrick, District Executive
Southern Pennsylvania District, Church of the Brethren
New Oxford

The Rev. Robert L. Driesen, Bishop
Upper Susquehanna Synod, ELCA
Lewisburg

The Rev. Dr. David L. Fife, Bishop's Assistant
Eastern Pennsylvania Conference, The United Methodist Church
Norristown

Dr. Pamela H. Ford, Superintendent
State College District, The United Methodist Church
State College

Karen K. Gallagher, Conference Minister
The Schwenkfelder Church
Worcester

The Rev. Dr. Donald B. Green, Executive Director
Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania
Pittsburgh

The Rev. Gary L. Harke, Executive Director
Pennsylvania Council of Churches
Harrisburg

The Rev. Neil P. Harrison, Executive Director
Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania
Harrisburg

Larry Hollar, Regional Organizer for Pennsylvania
Bread for the World
Dayton, Ohio

The Rev. B. Penrose Hoover, Bishop
Lower Susquehanna Synod, ELCA
Harrisburg

The Rev. Ralph E. Jones, Bishop
Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA
Oil City

The Rev. K. Joy Kaufmann, General Presbyter
Presbytery of Huntingdon
Bellwood

The Rev. Kurt F. Kusserow, Bishop
Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA
Pittsburgh

Bishop Jane Allen Middleton, Resident Bishop
Harrisburg Area, The United Methodist Church
Mechanicsburg

The Rev. Alan C. Miller, Conference Minister
Penn Northeast Conference, United Church of Christ
Palmerton

The Rev. F. Russell Mitman, D. Min., Conference Minister and President
Pennsylvania Southeast Conference, United Church of Christ
Collegeville

Bishop Richard Franklin Norris, Presiding Bishop
1st Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church
Philadelphia

The Rev. Gregory R. Pile, Bishop
Allegheny Synod, ELCA
Altoona

The Rev. Bette J. Poe, Superintendent, Scranton District
Wyoming Annual Conference, The United Methodist Church
Scranton

Soozung Rankin, Executive Director
A United Methodist Witness in Pennsylvania
Harrisburg

Jacqueline Rucker, Executive Director
Christian Churches United of the Tri-County Area
Harrisburg

The Rev. Dr. Steven H. Shussett, Teaching Presbyterian
Presbytery of Lehigh
Allentown

The Rev. Craig H. Smith, District Executive
Atlantic Northeast District, Church of the Brethren
Elizabethtown

The Rev. Schaunel Steinnagel, Hunger Action Enabler
Presbytery of Philadelphia
Philadelphia

The Rev. Gary Straughan, President
Eastern District Executive Board, Moravian Church, Northern Province
Bethlehem

The Rev. Sandra L. Strauss, Director of Public Advocacy
Pennsylvania Council of Churches
Harrisburg

The Rev. David R. Strobel, Bishop
Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA
Wescosville

The Rev. Dr. Wayne A. Yost, General Presbyterian
Presbytery of Kiskiminetas
Yatesboro

(Note: Organizations listed for identification only)

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Bread for the World is a collective Christian voice urging our nation's decision makers to end hunger at home and abroad. By changing policies, programs and conditions that allow hunger and poverty to persist, we provide help and opportunity far beyond the communities in which we live.

Please visit our Web site at <http://www.bread.org>.