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## 2007 Farm Bill is Important to All

Very serious work on the 2007 Farm Bill is in progress.

This type of legislation is renewed every 5 or 6 years with significant amending involved at each renewal.

On the one hand, this legislation is substantially important—we all need to eat, and there are so many facets involved for that to happen. On the other hand, we (unfortunately) have fewer farmers, and so somehow it feels less important to many of us, apparently.

We Kentuckians are hungrier and poorer than our U.S. people generally. Some 12.8% of Kentucky households are hungry or at risk of hunger (U.S.: 11.4%). Some 14.9% of Kentucky people live in poverty (U.S.: 12.5%); in Kentucky rural areas, 18.4% of us are poor.

As I understand recent U.S. farm policy, the 1987 Farm Bill was heavily skewed in favor of big business farming. This has led to the great reduction of the number of farms, especially smaller, family owned ones, as well as loss of valuable farmland. This farm and agribusiness consolidation is limiting competition and innovation in the marketplace and is hard on the land. Certain crops are overproduced and this creates artificially low prices that threaten the livelihoods of farmers in the U.S. and abroad. Further, farm subsidies disproportionately go to very large farms and certain parts of the U.S., and neglect entrepreneurial and diversified farms and regions that raise livestock and crops including vegetables and fruit.

In 2007 there is great need for a more *balanced* farm policy. History points to the importance of it all.

To his credit, Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns in June 2005 sought input to the 2007 bill. From that input, the Department of Agriculture developed draft legislation that was put out widely for comment via regional meetings, mail, internet. The amended draft is now before Congress where it goes to House and Senate committees,

then floor votes in each chamber and very likely to a conference committee before being sent to the president for signing into law for another 5 or 6 years.

The proposed 2007 Farm Bill is enormous—10 titles, the 10<sup>th</sup> being “Miscellaneous”. The other 9 titles are: I Commodity Programs; II Conservation; III Trade; IV Nutrition Programs; V Credit; VI Rural Development; VII Research and Related Matters; VIII Forestry; IX Energy.

Some priorities put forth by groups like Bread for the World (a national Christian citizens advocacy organization) include:

- ◆ Strengthen and expand programs that reduce hunger and improve nutrition in the U.S.
- ◆ Increase investments that strengthen rural communities.
- ◆ Provide a broader, more equitable system of support for U.S. farmers and rural communities.
- ◆ Strengthen policies that promote conservation and stewardship of the land.
- ◆ Protect the health and safety of farmworkers.
- ◆ Expand energy-related research.
- ◆ Improve and expand international food aid.
- ◆ Support the efforts of farmers in developing countries to sell their crops and feed their families.

An overall goal for us all: Healthy food, farms and families. (This is the fitting title for Bread for the World Institute’s 2007 Hunger report!).

It will help a lot if we pay attention to work on this important legislation, work with organizations focusing on it, and share wisdom with our U.S. Senators and Representatives. Senator Mitch McConnell serves on the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Committee. All 3 serve on money-related committees. They need our help with this great work!

March 2007

*The Catholic Conference of Kentucky (CCK) is an agency of the Catholic Bishops of Kentucky, established in 1968. It speaks for the Church in matters of public policy, serves as liaison to government and the legislature, and coordinates communications and activities between the church and secular agencies. There are 406,000 Catholics in the Commonwealth. The Bishops of the four dioceses of KY constitute CCK's Board of Directors.*