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One Hundred Thirteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
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September 17, 2013

The Honorable Debbie A. Stabenow
Chairwoman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
United States Senate

The Honorable Frank D. Lucas
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
United States Senate

The Honorable Collin C. Peterson
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Colleagues:

As you begin final consideration of the Federal Agriculture Reform and Risk Management Act of 2013, we write to urge you to modernize U.S. international food aid by incorporating broadly supported reforms into Title III, relating to the Food for Peace program.

For nearly 60 years, Food for Peace has served as the principle vehicle through which the United States has provided lifesaving emergency food aid, as well as non-emergency assistance to mitigate the need for future humanitarian interventions. Together, the U.S. Government, American farmers, and private voluntary organizations (PVOs), through Food for Peace, have helped billions of people in dire need in over 150 countries.

Unfortunately, it has become increasingly evident that our food aid system does not have the flexibility required to efficiently respond across a variety of complex, emergency situations and may ultimately undermine U.S. development efforts. Humanitarian disasters have increased 200 percent since 1980, threatening U.S. interests and exhausting existing resources. Moreover, monetization – the process by which organizations sell donated U.S. food in developing countries and use the proceeds to fund food distribution or other development projects – has been shown to waste money, slow economic growth, and harm the very people we are trying to help. From Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, U.S. interests have been unnecessarily undermined by an inflexible program that has failed to adapt to emerging circumstances.

Notable progress has been made over the past several years to improve the Food for Peace program – from the repositioning of U.S. commodities to reduce response time, to the strengthening of early warning systems to better prepare for weather-related shocks. Yet, in a time of constrained budgets and increasing needs, more must be done to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of our food aid system.

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Fortunately, momentum for reforming Food for Peace continues to grow. On June 19, 2013, 203 Members voted for the bipartisan Royce-Engel amendment to provide greater program flexibility and curtail monetization. Bipartisan efforts on the Senate Agriculture Committee to introduce reforms through the Senate Farm Bill are similarly significant and merit support.

Today, you have an opportunity to further improve and modernize the Food for Peace program, allowing the U.S. to reach more hungry people at no additional cost. We urge you to build upon the momentum for reform by pursuing targeted changes in the legislation that would bring greater flexibility and efficiency to our Food for Peace programs while maintaining the successful partnership with American farmers and PVOs.

Specifically, we encourage you to consider:

- Decreasing the reliance upon monetization by providing greater flexibility in funding for nonemergency food assistance programs and by establishing a ceiling, rather than a floor, for funds that may be used to support monetization; and
- Increasing the flexibility in funding for emergency food assistance programs – which could be phased in over the course of the Farm Bill – to enable the United States to utilize the most appropriate tools to respond to emergencies, including Local and Regional Procurement (LRP), cash transfers, vouchers, and agricultural commodities.

Food for Peace remains the cornerstone of U.S. efforts to reduce global hunger and malnutrition. We believe these changes will strengthen the program by enabling the United States to reach more people, more quickly, at less cost.

We appreciate your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,



EDWARD R. ROYCE
Chairman



ELIOT L. ENGEL
Ranking Member