INTERNATIONAL FOOD AID PROGRAMS
2023 Farm Bill

BACKGROUND

After decades of progress, global hunger is on the rise. Vulnerable communities have seen their food systems eroded by compounding shocks like conflict, climate change, and the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, an acute food crisis is spiraling around the world, driven by the conflict in Ukraine.

As many as 828 million people around the world faced chronic hunger per the latest global report—150 million more than in 2019. Women, girls, and children are most impacted by food insecurity and its devastating consequences. Thirty million children under the age of five are suffering from wasting, a form of acute malnutrition. This is not only a tragedy today—it is setting the stage for a continuing crisis.

The Farm Bill is a critical tool in fighting both acute and chronic hunger and malnutrition. Title III of the Farm Bill authorizes several important international food aid programs, including the following, which we urge Congress to reauthorize.

- Food for Peace Title II (“Food for Peace”)
- McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program (“McGovern-Dole Food for Education”)
- Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust
- Food for Progress

Food for Peace Non-Emergency Programs

Food for Peace reaches the poorest and most vulnerable families to save lives in times of emergency and addresses the root causes of food insecurity and malnutrition, helping to build resilience within communities. It administers two types of programs: emergency and non-emergency. In FY22, emergency programs accounted for 87% of Food for Peace spending. Funding for non-emergency programs, called the “safe box,” accounted for the remaining 13%. The safe box cannot be less than $365 million.

By investing in savings groups, access to agricultural loans, education on water management and risk management practices, non-emergency programs are proactively preventing future hunger crises. Every dollar invested in these resilience-building programs saves $3 in humanitarian assistance when crisis strikes. This is a significant return on investment, but these programs could work even better.

- Food for Peace non-emergency programs must be allowed to use the most effective form of assistance for the local context. Options include U.S.-sourced food, soil and water management training for smallholder farmers, village savings groups, small business start-up support, literacy training, or a combination of the above. This is crucial to maximize every dollar allocated.
- Congress must authorize robust funding for these non-emergency programs so that the most vulnerable communities can cope in the face of chronic shocks. This funding is an investment in preventing another hunger and malnutrition crisis like the one we are facing now.
- Food for Peace award management should also be streamlined to reduce costly administrative burdens and lower the barriers of entry for new and local implementing partners while also maintaining appropriate oversight.
- Food for Peace non-emergency programs must prioritize fostering self-reliance and avoid interventions that could lead to dependency.
McGovern-Dole Food for Education

Since 2002, McGovern-Dole has reached over 31 million children in 48 countries with nutritious school meals. It is more than a school feeding program—it is a sustainable investment in communities. The program boosts school enrollment and academic performance, especially for girls, and aims to improve children’s overall health and nutrition. Its local and regional procurement component (LRP), currently capped at 10%, helps develop local economies by purchasing food from local farmers.

Congress should bolster the effectiveness of McGovern-Dole LRP by expanding it to a range of 10 to 20% and permitting LRP funds to be used to help small-scale local farmers grow consistent, quality food to complement donated U.S. commodities in school meals. These changes would allow McGovern-Dole to catalyze self-sustaining school meals programs that continue after U.S. assistance ends.

Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust

The Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust provides funding to purchase U.S. commodities to alleviate severe hunger and malnutrition in times of extraordinary need. The Secretary of Agriculture governs the trust and authorizes the release of funds when the USAID Administrator requests it. The Trust was drawn down in 2022—for the first time since 2014—in response to extreme need. It provided $282 million for the purchase of commodities. USDA’s Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) provided $388 million on top of this sum to cover ocean freight transportation, inland transport, shipping and handling, and other costs.

Congress should provide a replenishment mechanism for the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust and lower the barriers to access funding from the Trust.

Food for Progress

Food for Progress projects focus on improving agricultural productivity and expanding agricultural trade. USDA donates U.S. agricultural commodities which can be distributed as food or monetized by selling them locally to fund projects.

Congress should reauthorize Food for Progress as well as the pilot program authorized in the 2018 Farm Bill to finance projects directly rather than through monetization. The pilot program has yet to be funded through appropriations.

Cargo Preference

Though outside of the Farm Bill, the Cargo Preference Act of 1954 (P.L. 83-664) has significant impact on the effectiveness of food aid programs. It requires that 50% of all government cargo, including food procured in the U.S. for international aid programs, be shipped on U.S.-flagged vessels. International food assistance constitutes 10-15% of all cargo preference shipments.

As a result, USAID paid nearly 30% more per metric ton in FY22 to ship commodities for Food for Peace than it would have absent this requirement. Further, the agency estimated that if cargo preference requirements had been waived in 2021, it would have saved $31 million, which translates to approximately 16 million more people reached with critical food assistance.

Congress should strengthen the effectiveness and reach of U.S. international food assistance programs by waiving or eliminating cargo preference requirements for life-saving food aid.