

The Menu



“But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” Luke 14:13-14

Newsletter of the UCC Social Justice Team

Issue 6, April 29, 2007

Chef's Special: Fairness in the Fields

What does scripture say? Catholic Social Teaching: **“For I was hungry and you gave me food”**

A poor man's field may produce abundant food, but injustice sweeps it away. Proverbs 13:23



The primary goals of agricultural policies should be providing food for all people and reducing poverty among farmers and farmworkers in this country and abroad. A key measure of every agricultural program and legislative initiative is whether it helps the most vulnerable farmers, farmworkers, and their families and whether it contributes to a global food system that provides basic nutrition for all.

Limited government resources for subsidies and other forms of support should be targeted to small and moderate-sized farms, especially minority-owned farms, to help them through difficult times caused by changes in global agricultural markets or weather patterns that destroy crops. Agricultural subsidies often go to a few large producers, while smaller family farms struggle to survive. Rather than simply rewarding production, which can lead to surpluses and falling prices, government resources should reward environmentally sound and sustainable farming practices.

Source: Excerpts from: Catholic Reflections on Food, Farmers and Farmworkers, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 2003

One Farmer's Story: Gnagna Traoré

“With US Subsidies Comes Lower Prices and a Change in How Africans Farm” *By Chris Hufstader*

Gnagna Traoré grows peanuts, millet and cotton on her 10-hectare (24 acre) farm near Fana, Mali. Farming supports seven people in her immediate family. Madame Traoré and her grandson run the farm together since her husband passed away.

The family counts on growing cotton to earn cash. Since they get so little for their millet and peanuts, cotton is their sole source of income. Last year they grew cotton on one hectare and borrowed money to buy fertilizer and pesticide for it. At the end of the growing season, they sold all their cotton, but the price was so low they lost money. Desperate to make money this year, they had to borrow more money to grow cotton on

three hectares, gambling that a slightly higher price will help them get ahead.

Madame Traoré said that growing cotton was not always so difficult.

“You used to get something out of cotton,” she explained. “We used to help the men on the farm, and we got paid for it. We got money out of it from our husbands, for our families.

“Back in those days there really was money in cotton. Now there is nothing. You plant, you wait, you harvest, and spend days and days and days harvesting... and in the end you still have nothing and you can't feed your children.”

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What can I do to SUPPORT “fairness in the fields?”

Educate yourself by visiting the following websites:

- www.oxfamamerica.org/farmbill
- www.bread.org/take-action/take-action-seeds-of-change.html
- www.usccb.org/sdwp/projects/csmg2007.htm
- www.usda.gov/farmbill

Buy fair-trade and locally grown foods at the weekly farmers market at Republic Square, the Wheatville Co-op, or Whole Foods

Write or call your Senators and Representative about reforming the farm bill, using the following talking points:

- Increase investments that combat rural poverty and strengthen rural communities
- Expand programs that reduce hunger and improve nutrition
- Strengthen and increase investment in policies that promote conservation and good stewardship of the land
- Provide transitions for farmers to alternative forms of support that are more equitable and do not distort trade in ways that fuel hunger and poverty
- Protect the health and safety of farmworkers
- Expand research related to alternative and renewable forms of energy
- Provide direct food aid efficiently and effectively to hungry people in other nations. *Source: www.usccb.org/sdwp*

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Farm Bill to be reauthorized in 2007

In 2007 Congress must reauthorize an omnibus piece of legislation known as the Farm Bill, which sets policy that affects domestic food producers, food consumers and farmers in developing countries. Reauthorization of the Farm Bill presents an opportunity to reshape our broken agricultural policies to build a more just framework that better serves rural communities and small and moderate-size family farms in the U.S., promotes good stewardship of the land, overcomes hunger here and abroad and helps vulnerable farmers and their families in developing countries.

Strengthen Rural Communities:

We must invest in rural development programs, promoting and maintaining the culture and values of rural

communities. Congress should consider rural economic development strategies including: assistance to help new farmers and ranchers; investment in education, and training, fostering entrepreneurship and expanding use of renewable energy.

Improve the Food Stamp Program:

Among the priorities for Farm Bill reauthorization are ending the five-year waiting period for adult legal immigrants before they can receive Food Stamps, increasing benefit levels to reflect higher food costs, and improving outreach and enrollment so the millions of eligible families not yet enrolled can get help.

Foster Land Stewardship:

Protecting God's creation must be central to agricultural policies. Congress should

promote soil conservation, improve water quality, protect wildlife, and maintain biodiversity. Government resources should be targeted to farmers and ranchers that use environmentally sound practices.

Re-evaluate Agriculture Support Programs:

Agricultural subsidies often go to a few large producers, while family farms struggle to survive. Government resources should be targeted to small and moderate-sized farms to help them through difficult times caused by changes in global agricultural markets or weather patterns. Subsidy programs can also have distorting effects on international commodities markets that violate international trade obligations and make it harder for farmers in developing nations to make a living.

Safe Conditions for Farmworkers:

Agricultural labor involves some of the most dangerous jobs in the United States, with workers exposed to harsh working conditions, pesticides and other chemicals, and long labor-intensive work hours. Congress should strengthen pesticide protection, training programs and programs providing adequate housing and training for farm workers.

Fight Hunger Overseas:

Approximately 850 million people worldwide are considered food insecure. The Farm Bill should continue to provide for the use of U.S. commodities to help combat food insecurity around the world.

Source: USCCB Dept. of Social Devmt. and World Peace, <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/projects/200702fjbm.pdf>

SJ Team Mission statement:

The UCC Social Justice Team seeks to connect what we experience at Mass on Sunday to how we live the rest of the week by focusing on the tenets of charity and justice. We serve the common good through works of mercy for the poor and vulnerable and advocate for just social policy.

Pax Christi State Conference



May 19
8:30 AM-
5 PM

Pax Christi, the Catholic peace organization, will have their state conference in Austin at St. Catherine of Siena Church. Renowned Retired Bishop Gumbleton will give the Keynote address. The conference is a great way to learn about the nonviolence movement. For more info, visit http://stcatherine-austin.org/news_details.cfm?

"Stamp Out Hunger"

Volunteers Needed on May 12 -13

Each year, U.S. Postal Service letter carriers pick up massive amounts of food during their "Stamp Out Hunger" Food Drive. Volunteers are needed for each 3-hour shift to help sort the donations at the Food Bank on Sat. May 12 4 PM-11PM, and Sun. May 13 11AM-4PM. Contact Shawn Gunnin at 512-684-2544 to volunteer.

AAIM Community Assembly: Mayor Will Wynn on the Austin Climate Protection Plan Tues. May 1, 5:30PM

Austin Area Interfaith Ministries will host an assembly on a municipal plan recently passed by the City Council to counter the effects of greenhouse gases across the country with Mayor Will Wynn. This event, free and open to the public, will take place at the Carver Museum and Cultural Center (1165 Angelina St.). For more info, go to www.aaimaustin.org/delegate2.html or call 386-9145. Pre-registration is requested by Mon. April 30.

Like what you see? Want to become a part of it?

A small group of students and adults committed to promoting justice around the UCC and the community produces this bi-weekly newsletter, looks for opportunities to do charity and justice, leads workshops and hosts other events. If you would like to help with planning, or would like to submit to the newsletter, email sjteam@utcatholic.org.