



BACKGROUND

The picture of poverty is grim in rural America. The poverty rate in rural areas is 14 %, 2 % higher than in urban areas. The number is even higher for child poverty: 20 % compared to 17 % in urban areas. Nearly 400 counties in the U.S. have poverty rates of more than 20 % for the last 30 years. Nine out of 10 of these “persistent poverty” counties are rural.



Less than 2 % of the U.S. population is currently engaged in farming, compared to 21 % in 1930. Most of the rural residents work in non-farm jobs such as retail service or factory work. Commodity payments have shifted dramatically to the very largest farms, which are often the wealthiest farmers. Two-thirds of U.S. farmers receive no payments.

GOOD SHEPHERD CONNECTION

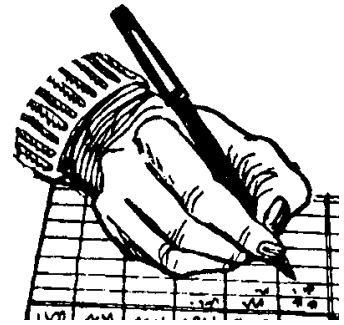
Our Destination Justice Focus Statement states that we believe that a commitment to social justice is as much a part of being a Catholic as the Eucharist. One of the principles of Catholic Social Teaching which we have been studying is preferential option for the pure and vulnerable. Helping farmers who need commodity payments is in keeping with this principle, as is combating hunger in rural America and developing countries.

ACTION

Write a letter to your Senators and Congress Representative, urging them to improve the farm bill, so that it will help struggling farmers. Rural communities are now less agriculturally based and people are at risk of hunger. Urge them to increase funding for the Food Stamp program and give emergency food assistance to countries suffering famine.

(See next page for a sample letter.)

Sample letter:



Rep. _____
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC, 20515
20510

Sen. _____
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC

Dear Rep. _____, (Or Dear Sen. _____)

Please improve the Farm Bill to provide better and broader support for struggling U.S. farmers and other rural families of modest means, strengthen rural communities, increase the Food Stamp program and support efforts of farmers in developing countries to sell their crops and feed their families.

Supporting these measures in the Farm Bill will help struggling rural people here in the United States and around the world plant the seeds of change.

Sincerely,
Your name
Your address

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For more information, [click here](#) or on the Bread for the World link on the Voices for Justice page on the Good Shepherd website www.mygoodshepherd.org

NOTE: There will also be an opportunity to write letters on this farm bill after all the Masses April 28 and 29.