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Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives

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April 5, 2013

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President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I write today to express my concern over your Administration's latest proposals to change the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food for Peace Program, also known as Public Law 480, away from in-kind food assistance. Although I support the United States' role in combating famine around the world, I am concerned that the reported changes your Administration is considering making to this vital program will do more harm than good.

As you know, the United States is the single largest donor of food aid in the world, providing considerable humanitarian assistance to those who are poor and hungry. Yet, along with saving millions of lives overseas, the Food for Peace Program is also critical to supporting employment among U.S. farmers and merchant mariners. In fact, when President Eisenhower signed into law legislation authorizing the program, he explained that the purpose was to "lay the basis for a permanent expansion of our exports of agricultural products with lasting benefits to ourselves and peoples of other lands." However, your Administration is reportedly considering changing the Food for Peace Program from in-kind food assistance to cash grants, or purchasing food from foreign suppliers. While it is imperative that measures be taken to improve the program, your Administration should instead focus on greater coordination, transparency, and accountability among the agencies that administer this program. Eliminating in-kind food assistance will be disastrous for many U.S. jobs and the domestic sealift capacity provided by the U.S. Merchant Marine, on which our U.S. military depends. The Food for Peace Program can, and should, continue to both benefit numerous communities throughout the U.S. while helping meet humanitarian food needs across the globe.

I urge your administration to reconsider shifting the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food for Peace Program away from in-kind food assistance, and instead make proper and adequate adjustments so that the United States can continue to help those overseas while also protecting jobs here at home.

Sincerely,

Ileana Ros-Lehtinen  
Member of Congress