

January 30, 2018

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

As supporters and implementers of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's McGovern Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition program, or the Food for Progress program, we, the undersigned organizations, urge your support for these programs in annual budget requests. We represent a diverse group of business, faith-based and non-profit groups that have seen first-hand how these programs improve livelihoods and educational opportunities, while building the political stability and capacity necessary to grow future markets for U.S. agricultural products.

The McGovern-Dole program provides high-quality American-sourced commodities for nutritious school lunches for millions of vulnerable children in 24 countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America. A lack of education is directly tied to poverty, and according to one study if all students in low-income countries learned basic reading skills, there would be 171 million fewer people living in poverty.¹ McGovern-Dole is designed to support increased school enrollment, attendance, and achievement, and thus combat poverty through education.

In poor communities that suffer from chronic hunger, McGovern-Dole lunches are a powerful incentive for parents to send their children to classes regularly, particularly since these lunches are often the only meal these children receive each day. In countries like Burkina Faso and Mali, schools participating in McGovern-Dole saw attendance rates skyrocket by about 40%. Young girls who traditionally do not have access to education have seen the greatest gains in school attendance, and as the Global Partnership for Education notes, "Educated girls and women tend to be healthier, have fewer children, earn more income and provide better health care for themselves and their future children."

The McGovern-Dole program also promotes education, child development and nutrition through complementary services. Examples include administering deworming medicine, providing greater access to clean water, and targeted teacher training and literacy interventions. In Mozambique, more than 8000 people graduated from accredited teacher training colleges, while in Honduras there was a 22% increase in literacy for participating primary school children, and in Guatemala teachers report that 40% more students are focusing on their studies because they are no longer hungry.

Food for Progress is an equally impactful program that strengthens and modernizes agricultural sectors in developing countries. This growth is especially important given that, according to a study by the World Bank, gross domestic product (GDP) growth originating in agriculture is

nearly three times more effective in reducing poverty than GDP growth originating outside this sector for the world's poorest people.ⁱⁱ In countries like Georgia, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Haiti and Honduras, businesses supported by Food for Progress saw a 30% rise in total employment and now support half a million jobs, a majority of which provide an income above the poverty line and over half of which are filled by women.

Food for Progress provides U.S. agricultural commodities to private voluntary organizations, which in turn sell these commodities and use the proceeds to fund programs. Food for Progress helps small producers adopt modern agricultural practices and engage in the market so they can more fully participate in both national and international agricultural value chains. As a result, individual livelihoods are strengthened like we saw in Bolivia, where the income of participating farmers rose 142%. Farmers who have been supported through Food for Progress productively add to the global economy and are contributing to products sold by major international brands such as GAP, Pizza Hut, and Jollibee.

Both McGovern-Dole and Food for Progress also directly contribute to important U.S. interests beyond helping other countries. For instance, in Fiscal Year 2015, these programs together purchased and shipped 428,288 metric tons of commodities grown by U.S. farmers. The provision of commodities is a lifeline to people living in poverty, and it is not lost on them that this aid is provided by the American people, which raises our country's stature and reputation around the world. As these people begin to prosper economically, thanks in part to our efforts, trade opportunities for American businesses will increase. Since both McGovern-Dole and Food for Progress give large numbers of people and businesses in developing countries the opportunity to use and familiarize themselves with high quality American commodities, U.S. agriculture is particularly well placed to capitalize on increased trade in the future.

In explaining the Trade Title of the 2014 Farm Bill, the title that created the important Undersecretary for Trade and Foreign Agriculture position, the bill's Managers "affirmed the importance of maintaining strong development programs in support of building resilient communities and reducing dependency on foreign assistance."ⁱⁱⁱ We agree with their statement and know it is imperative to millions of people that the important work of McGovern-Dole and Food for Progress continue.

We appreciate the ongoing work of your dedicated staff at the Foreign Agriculture Service and we look forward to working with you on these critical and impactful programs.

Sincerely,

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Secretary for Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs
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ⁱ EFA Global Monitoring Report 2013/14 (UNESCO 2014)

ⁱⁱ http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDRS/Resources/477365-1327599046334/8394679-1327606607122/WDR08_02_ch01.pdf Page 30

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.agriculture.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/SOMandEarmarkFINAL.pdf>