



## Recaps and Updates

### Renewable energy in Colorado

In this month's ["Advocating on the Road" blog series](#), we heard from members of congregations in Colorado who take their stewardship of God's earth, and our shared air and water, very seriously. They have made a faith-filled decision to pursue cleaner ways to power their congregations and to advocate that their state adopt a renewable energy standard (RES). ELCA members in Colorado are joining congregations around the country in realizing that energy choices have consequences for God's earth and are choosing to invest in renewable energy as a way to live out their faith. Learn more [here](#)<sup>[B1]</sup>.

### Update on the farm bill

Federal agriculture programs shape what farmers grow, what is sold in our grocery stores, and all of the steps that make up our food system. They impact the efforts of churches and community organizations to fight hunger and the efforts of the health community to encourage all of us to eat a healthier diet. Federal agriculture programs encourage farming practices that help to protect air and water quality nationwide. And as the government has worked to ensure a stable food supply, these federal policies have profoundly shaped our country's rural communities.

As people of faith who are concerned about hunger, understanding and influencing the forces that shape our food economy is essential if we are to make sure that all who are hungry are fed. As a church that cares for God's creation, we are called to support and encourage agricultural policies and programs that encourage good stewardship of land and

water. As a church that is present in many of our county's rural communities, speaking out for policies that support rural economic growth and the long-term stability of the small, medium and large farms that are the core of those communities is central to our calling as advocates.

In late June, the U.S. Senate passed a bill to renew federal food and farm programs ranging from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP -- formerly known as food stamps), which helps the working poor keep food on their tables in tough economic times, to the educational and outreach programs that help beginning and disadvantaged farmers get started in the business of agriculture.

The Senate farm bill found \$23 billion in savings over 10 years, primarily by shifting farm programs from a system of price-driven support payments that were available only to farmers growing limited types of crops, to a system based on risk management and an expansion of federally subsidized crop insurance. The final bill placed some restrictions on the availability of this insurance -- farms with revenues of over \$750,000 per year will see their crop insurance premium subsidy reduced as their income rises. In addition, farmers that receive a crop insurance premium subsidy will need to comply with basic soil and water conservation measures thanks to an amendment championed by Sen. Saxby Chambliss and Sen. Richard Durbin.

The federal SNAP program was cut by nearly \$5 billion over a 10-year period, and efforts to restore these cuts on the Senate floor were unsuccessful. However, several amendments that would have placed further cuts or restrictions on the SNAP program also failed to pass. In addition, the cut in SNAP funding is smaller than what is anticipated in a House version of the farm bill; the House Agriculture Committee will begin work on its bill following the Fourth of July recess.

The Senate's bill also includes funding for rural development programs and for educational and financial support for beginning farmers and ranchers and farmers from groups that are under-represented in farming and ranching, such as women and minorities. These programs were either not funded or underfunded, in the original bill, but thanks to an amendment sponsored by ELCA member Sen. Sherrod Brown of Ohio they will receive funding in the final Senate bill.

As the debate over a new farm bill moves to the House, there is likely to be less common ground among farm state and urban lawmakers over funding levels for key anti-hunger programs and for reforms to find savings in the farm-support programs, including the requirement that farms receiving crop insurance subsidies comply with basic conservation practices. In addition, the budget process in the House is likely to require even steeper cuts in farm bill programs, including SNAP and programs in the conservation title of the bill.

Keep an eye on your inbox for farm bill-related opportunities and updates from the ELCA e-Advocacy Network. Continued letters and calls from constituents in the coming weeks will be extremely important as the House writes its version of a farm bill.

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