

Farm and Agriculture Policies

Whenever the Presbyterian Church (USA) addresses the complex question of the nation's food and farm policies, we refer to a General Assembly faith conviction "that God our Creator has made the world for everyone, and desires that all shall have daily bread" (UPCUSA, *Minutes*, 1979, p. 189). This underlying conviction of a right to food shapes convictions about agriculture and rural life in this country.

For almost half a century, various General Assemblies have spoken strongly in support of "the family farm as basic to a sound agricultural economy" (PCUS, *Minutes*, 1947, p. 198). They have called for policies which provide "...reasonable price and income stability to American farmers...at a level which gives incentive for full production" (UPCUSA, *Minutes*, 1976, p. 504); "...preserves prime land for agricultural purposes..." (PCUS, *Minutes*, 1977, p. 182); "and transforms agrarian structures in the interests of more justice for small farmers and landless farm laborers in other countries so that those countries can more adequately meet their own domestic food needs" (PCUS, *Minutes*, 1977, p. 181).

In a 1985 statement, the General Assembly wrote "we believe it is the responsibility and duty of the Federal government to enact a comprehensive, long-term food and fiber policy, with specific price, production and conservation goals designed to protect and enhance family-farm agriculture in the United States."

"We believe further that this nation must establish a strong system of sustainable agriculture and prevent the continuing concentration of land in the hands of a smaller and smaller number of owners" (*Minutes*, 1985, p. 399).

Of particular concern has been the continuing loss of land by minority farmers. The 1983 Assembly urged the United States Department of Agriculture "to develop and expand programs aimed at stopping the loss of land by black farmers" (*Minutes*, 1983, p. 360).

Despite the general prosperity in the U.S. during the last few years, many small farmers and ranchers and their rural communities have faced difficult financial times. African American farmers were finally given some redress by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), but many believe it was too little, too late.

Being concerned about the plight of rural Americans, the 1999 General Assembly adopted a resolution on the "Farm Crisis in America." It calls for advocating for the survival of family farmers, ranchers, and rural communities, including black and other racial ethnic farmers and farm workers by raising public and consumer awareness in congregations and presbyteries of the problems facing family agriculture today and the individuals in those families. The resolution also requests that the PC(USA) advocate for and support trade policies that assure domestic food security for all nations and assure that no nation's agricultural producers should have their product valued at a globally traded surplus price. (*Minutes*, 1999).

The 2002 General Assembly approved “We Are What We Eat: Recommendations and Report,” which called on Presbyterians to influence the agricultural revolution by “pray[ing] for farmers/ranchers throughout the world, farm and agricultural workers, rural churches and communities, directors and employees of transnational corporations, lawmakers, rural churches and communities, directors and employees of transnational corporations, lawmakers, and for each of us as we make choices related to the food we produce, process, and consume.” Recommendations included calling on the Presbyterian Washington Office to “alert Presbyterians about upcoming public policy related to the agricultural revolution and food production/ consumption and encourage members of the PC(USA) to contact legislators urging support of the family farmer/ranchers, farm and processing plant workers, and equitable world trade policy.” (*Minutes*, 2002, pp. 533-559)

The 2002 Assembly also addressed the issue of farm worker justice, “offer[ing] its prayers for the farm workers of Florida” and “call[ing] upon Presbyterians to endorse and support the national boycott of Taco Bell Restaurants and all Taco Bell products until Taco Bell, Six-L’s Corporation, and the Coalition of Immokalee Workers mutually agree to begin negotiations that can lead to resolution of inhumane working and living conditions.” (*Minutes*, 2002, p. 571) On March 8, 2005, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and Taco Bell Corporation reached an historic agreement that both concretely addresses farm workers' wages and working conditions and is the first step in moving the fast-food industry toward a new way of doing business that respects human rights.