

FOREIGN AGRICULTURAL SERVICE

**Statement of Ken Isley, Administrator
Before the House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development,
Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies**

September 25, 2019

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to discuss the international food assistance and capacity building programs administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). As Administrator of the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), I want to thank the Subcommittee for your continued support for the Agency.

Introduction

USDA administers three international food assistance programs established and funded by Congress: the Food for Progress Program (FFPr); the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program (McGovern-Dole); and the Local and Regional Food Aid Procurement Program (LRP). These programs operated in a total of 38 developing countries in fiscal year (FY) 2018.

The President's 2020 Budget did not fund FFPr or McGovern-Dole; rather the Budget proposes to fund related food aid, development and education programs through U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) bilateral programs.

McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program

McGovern-Dole provides school meals and nutrition programs for pre- and primary school age children, women, and infants in countries with high food insecurity. McGovern-Dole projects are implemented by private voluntary organizations (PVOs), international organizations,

and other partners. The program's statutory objectives are to improve food security; reduce hunger; improve literacy and primary education, with an emphasis on girls; and carry out maternal, infant, and child nutrition programs. McGovern-Dole project designs are intended to "graduate" from reliance on USDA assistance and become self-sustaining with active involvement and support from the host government or local communities.

For FY 2019, USDA recently announced preliminary funding allocations for nine McGovern-Dole proposals valued at approximately \$191 million. U.S. commodities will be provided over the term of these agreements to school feeding programs in Cambodia, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Malawi, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Togo, and Uzbekistan. At the end of FY 2018, McGovern-Dole had a total of 43 active projects in 27 countries valued at over \$921 million. The projects reached over 4.3 million children and community members directly in FY 2018.

FAS will be updating the McGovern-Dole regulations with a final rule to implement a provision in the 2018 Farm Bill that allows up to 10 percent of McGovern-Dole funding to be used annually for the local and regional procurement of commodities.

In 2018, Kenya, whose school feeding program was originally launched by the World Food Programme in 1980 and which was funded by McGovern-Dole starting in 2004, became the first country in Africa to transition all schools previously supported by McGovern-Dole to a government-supported national school meal program. The Government of Kenya has become a leader in school feeding, developing home grown school meals policies and programs. USDA worked closely with our implementing partner, World Food Programme (WFP), to support Kenya's efforts. McGovern-Dole projects in Kenya in the past have supported more than 4,000 schools.

Food for Progress

FFPr has two principal objectives: to improve agricultural productivity in developing countries and emerging democracies and to expand trade in agricultural products. Donated U.S. agricultural commodities are shipped to recipient countries and sold on the local market in a process that is often referred to as monetization. The proceeds are used to support agricultural, economic, or infrastructure development projects. FFPr projects have trained farmers in animal and plant health, improved farming methods, developed road and utility systems, established producer cooperatives, provided microcredit, and developed agricultural value chains. FFPr project implementers have included PVOs, foreign governments, universities, and intergovernmental organizations.

For FY 2019, USDA announced preliminary allocations for seven FFPr projects totaling nearly \$140 million. Funding is provided through the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC). The countries to be covered through these projects include Ethiopia, Indonesia, Paraguay, the Philippines, Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, and Venezuela. There is also a project focused across the East African Community. The FY 2019 preliminary allocation for Venezuela is contingent upon initiation of a democratic transition. Together, the FY 2019 FFPr projects are intended to reach over 239,000 beneficiaries directly over the next five years. At the end of FY 2018, there were 52 active FFPr projects in 31 countries valued at over \$1.016 billion.

The FFPr program was reauthorized by the 2018 Farm Bill through December 31, 2023. Current operations continued uninterrupted under the new Farm Bill. The Farm Bill also added U.S. public and non-profit colleges and universities as eligible entities to receive FFPr awards.

A Food for Progress project in East Timor has helped to support the export of locally cultivated crops that do not compete with U.S. production and created opportunities for subsistence farmers to increase their income. USDA's FFPr activities in East Timor touch along

the entire agricultural value chain from providing seedlings to farmers, to equipment purchases and assistance in exporting harvested crops. Sustainability is a key goal. FFPr supported activities have resulted in new commercial market relationships between U.S. companies and East Timor producers. The program is intended to benefit local producers of commodities, including cloves, vanilla, coffee, black pepper, and cacao. The project's first yields of organic, fair-trade certified coffee will commence in 2019 with more than 19 tons in the upcoming harvest headed to international buyers, including U.S. importers. U.S. companies have also recently purchased more than 50 tons of cloves and 4 tons of vanilla.

Local and Regional Food Aid Procurement Program

First authorized as a permanent program in the 2014 Farm Bill, LRP was designed to provide a complementary mechanism for delivering international food assistance. Preference for funding is given to entities implementing active projects under McGovern-Dole. The objectives of LRP include strengthening the ability of local and regional farmers, community farmer groups, farmer cooperatives and associations, processors, and agribusinesses to provide high-quality commodities. LRP can enhance organizations' abilities to procure such commodities in support of school feeding programs, provide technical and management expertise, and, in coordination with USAID, help expedite provision of safe and quality foods to populations affected by food crises and disasters.

For FY 2019, Congress directed \$15 million of McGovern-Dole funds to be used to conduct LRP. USDA recently announced a preliminary allocation of these funds to projects in Burkina-Faso, Cambodia, and Nicaragua. In FY 2019, USDA LRP projects are estimated to reach more than 105,000 school-age children. LRP projects aim to strengthen the ability of local host governments to take ownership of McGovern-Dole projects. Including local commodities, such as fruits and vegetables, increases the acceptability and palatability of nutritious meals, strengthens supply chains, and boosts local support for sustainability.

LRP project designs are intended to improve diets and support local farmers. For example, USDA awarded LRP funding to a 2-year project designed to incorporate orange-fleshed sweet potatoes into daily school meals in Mozambique. Farmers received assistance growing sweet potatoes that were then harvested and purchased for use at schools, benefitting 25,000 school-aged children. With the proceeds earned from selling the sweet potatoes, the farmers were able to reinvest in the following year's crops.

Coordinating USDA Food Aid Programs

From selecting countries and priorities to reviewing proposals, monitoring agreements, evaluating project performance, and reporting progress, USDA's food assistance staff coordinate with colleagues across the Department and the U.S. Government, particularly USAID, as well as with donors, stakeholders, and recipients.

USAID and USDA regularly share priority country selection. USDA food assistance staff work daily with their colleagues at USAID and meet regularly with USAID's Office of Food for Peace to discuss issues related to specific programs, commodity specifications, leveraging resources, and managing constraints. USDA has a memorandum of understanding on education with USAID to promote coordination between our McGovern-Dole projects and USAID's education programs.

Collaboration with our interagency partners does not occur just in Washington. As Administrator of FAS, I know the benefits of FAS attachés collaborating in embassies around the world. USDA's food assistance program staff work closely with our overseas posts to select priority countries and themes for food assistance programs. This also includes working with our overseas colleagues from USAID, the State Department, the Department of Commerce, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, and numerous other agencies.

Experienced subject matter experts across not only FAS, but also across USDA, are included in the proposal review process. There is a wealth of knowledge and agricultural expertise across USDA. For example, representatives from the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) provide nutrition-related input on McGovern-Dole proposals and staff from the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) provide input on commodity selections.

We also work closely with our implementing partners, including U.S. PVOs, the United Nations food agencies, and U.S. land grant universities. USDA holds public meetings with stakeholders when soliciting proposals or making changes to a program, . . .

Monitoring and Evaluation

Collecting evidence on the effectiveness of food aid interventions is an important part of USDA's administration of these programs. In recent years, we have strengthened our monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems. In administering our food assistance programs, FAS adheres to a Results Oriented Management (ROM) approach.

To support ROM, all food aid projects use a monitoring and evaluation system that is formalized in the FAS food aid operations M&E policy and indicator handbook. The policy and handbook were updated in FY 2019. The system requires implementers to use standard indicators to measure performance and report on results, which allows us to aggregate results in a unified way across countries and time. Implementers must also commission objective third-party evaluations of their projects' outcomes.

USDA invests in independent research that helps answer questions identified in our programmatic Learning Agendas, which serve as 5-year strategic documents used to prioritize areas where evidence is needed most for the improvement of programs. To share such research and to fulfill our strong commitment to transparency, we recently collaborated with USAID to publicly post evaluations of USDA food aid projects in the Development Experience Clearinghouse, which is USAID's public portal for monitoring and evaluation. As USDA

continues to make food aid evidence available to fellow stakeholders in the field and to the American public, we expect the evidence base to grow regarding what works and what doesn't in food assistance to the benefit all U.S. food aid programs.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. USDA appreciates the opportunity to speak to the Subcommittee about the administration of our international food assistance and capacity building programs.