News



Students at DEC Primary School in Falaba, Sierra Leone, are seen in a 2017 photo with their daily meal of rice and lentils. The school program is part of the "Food For Education" Project funded by U.S. Department of Agriculture where each student receives a meal of fortified rice and lentils five days a week. (OSV News/Michael Duff for Catholic Relief Services)

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Washington, D.C. — May 22, 2025
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Catholic Relief Services said May 21 that most of its projects under a federal international food aid program were terminated, leaving hundreds of thousands of children more vulnerable to hunger.

The Trump administration said it was seeking to "align" its programs "with the President's agenda."

More than 780,000 children across 11 countries will be left without their school meal, in many cases their only meal of the day, as a result of the termination of 11 out of CRS' 13 projects under the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program being terminated, CRS said.

The program — named for the late Ambassador and Sen. George McGovern and former Sen. Robert Dole, both advocates of ending childhood hunger — purchases agricultural commodities grown in the U.S. to support school food programs and maternal and early childhood nutrition programs in countries around the world, with the stated purpose of reducing hunger and promoting literacy, preventing children from trying to learn with empty stomachs.

Commodities purchased by the program include flour from Oklahoma, bulgur from Kansas, beans and lentils from North Dakota, and vegetable oil from states including Arkansas, Florida, Illinois and Iowa, according to the Agriculture Department's website.

Politico reported May 20 the program was among the major international food aid grants the Agriculture Department plans to cancel. The White House's proposed fiscal 2026 spending plan called for entirely eliminating the McGovern-Dole program. The first Trump administration proposed a similar plan, but Congress continued to fund the program.

A spokesperson for the Agriculture Department said in a statement shared with OSV News the programs that have been terminated did not align "with the foreign

assistance objectives of the Trump Administration."

Sean Callahan, CRS president and CEO, said in a statement, "This decision isn't just a policy shift — it's a life-altering blow to hundreds of thousands of children who rely on these meals to stay healthy, stay in school and stay hopeful about their future."

"Having just returned from Honduras, where I saw one of the programs in action, I can confidently say its success is undeniable," Callahan continued. "I witnessed firsthand the remarkable contributions of the community and local government. I spoke with young children who endure nearly two-hour walks to school each day — driven by the hope of receiving both a meal and an education. It is un-American to stand by and not provide assistance while hunger robs children of their chance to learn and thrive."

The Agriculture Department's spokesperson said that President Donald Trump "is putting America First and at USDA we are ensuring our programs align with the President's agenda to make America safer, stronger, and more prosperous."

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"After completing a thorough review of USDA's Food for Progress and McGovern-Dole programs in accordance with Executive Order 14169, Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid, USDA has terminated 27 Food for Progress program agreements and 17 McGovern-Dole program agreements that are not in alignment with the foreign assistance objectives of the Trump Administration," the statement said. "14 Food for Progress agreements (serving 17 countries) and 30 McGovern Dole agreements (serving 22 countries) remain, totaling more than $1 billion in funding, including projects of Catholic Relief Services."

The spokesperson also said "all U.S. agricultural producers have received payment for commodities for which invoices have been received."

"Those projects which were terminated received a 30 day notification. During this time partners are required to deliver any commodity to its final destination, in accordance with the Agreement, to ensure no product goes to waste," they said. "The USDA has posted the 2025 notice of funding opportunity for McGovern-Dole on USDA.gov, with an emphasis on a safer, stronger, and more prosperous program. We

look forward to ensuring USDA foreign aid is spent implementing existing projects, as well as any new projects, that continue to put American agriculture at the forefront and align with the President's agenda."

But Callahan said, "Ending a program that provides a child's only meal is deeply troubling and goes against our values as a nation and as people of faith."

"We have a moral responsibility to ensure vulnerable children have access to the nourishment they need to learn, grow and build a better future," he added.

On its website, CRS urged its supporters to "ask the administration to reverse the terminations of CRS' McGovern-Dole Food for Education and Food for Progress programs and continue providing lifesaving and life-affirming food aid."

"We call on the administration to reconsider its decision and restore funding for these life-affirming programs," Callahan said. "By reinstating the McGovern-Dole awards in particular, we can ensure children continue to have access to daily meals in school, and invest in their future, their health, and their ability to break the cycle of poverty."