



Representative Ed Royce
(R - CA) - The potential
hero of food aid reform

These next 48 hours are critical for advancing reform of US international food aid, [which I have blogged about previously](#). Short version: because current rules essentially demand that we provide aid in food grown in the US via government subsidy, our current aid regime wastes money, delays delivery of aid by weeks, lines the pockets of agribusiness and big shipping, often undermines farmers in the Global South, and leaves 2-4 million people starving who could otherwise be helped.

The basic answer is to allow food to be procured locally; the Obama Administration's budget proposal did just that, and [was given the back of the hand by special interests in the Senate](#). The Senate bill, which passed the Upper House, did add some extra money for local procurement, but fell far short of what was really needed. [The pathetic justifications offered by the agribusiness and shipping lobbies](#) show just how weak their policy position is.

And now — maybe the House to the rescue. ***The House?*** The current House? You gotta be kidding, right?

Wrong. The hero here is [House International Relations Committee chair Ed Royce](#), a very conservative Republican from Orange County, who studied the way food aid rules work, and got outraged. That's hardly odd for a conservative, because farm policy represents about the clearest case of government waste we have. It didn't hurt, of course, that allowing for local procurement would also take much food aid from the Agriculture Committee and give it to the IR committee, but that really wasn't what was happening here: this is an outrage and everyone who looks at it realizes it.

Originally, Royce teamed up with IR Global Affairs Subcommittee ranking member [Karen Bass](#), a liberal African-American Democrat from Los Angeles, to introduce the [Food Aid Reform Act](#), which would allow for local procurement as a general matter. Before the House can vote on that, however, it needs to consider the Farm Bill, so Royce and [IR Committee ranking member Eliot Engel \(D - NY\)](#) have proposed an amendment to the House bill that essentially replicates the Food Aid Reform Act. The House will consider that amendment as early as Wednesday.

Think about that for a second: "the House will consider that amendment as early as Wednesday." That says a lot. Amendments don't get considered on the floor of the House

unless the Rules Committee allows them to be considered, and the Rules Committee doesn't allow them to be considered unless it's okay with the leadership. That means that at least, there is substantial support in the Republican Conference for this measure. GOP to the rescue!

Of course, they should support it. Reforming food aid to allow for local procurement (as well as other crucial reforms) is such a no-brainer that it is perhaps the last genuinely bipartisan policy initiative out there. Don't believe me? [Even the Heritage Foundation favors this](#). Does that make you as a liberal Democrat get nauseous? Well, me too, sort of, but [the same reforms are backed by the Center for American Progress](#).

So **now** — which is to say, right now, as soon as the business day starts in Washington DC — call your Congresscritter and ask them to support the Royce-Engel Amendment (#55) to the Farm Bill. After the jump, I'm including the talking points prepared by the [American Jewish World Service](#), which in conjunction with lots of other charities like Bread for the World, Oxfam, Catholic Relief Services, and many others, has spearheaded this campaign. [You should drop a dime for them, too](#), by the way.

But really: call. write. E-mail. This means life or death for people. Do it.



I'm writing, as a constituent and as a supporter of American Jewish World Service [<http://www.ajws.org/>](http://www.ajws.org/), to urge you to vote YES on the Royce-Engel Amendment (#55) when it comes up during the Farm Bill debate this week.

The bi-partisan Royce-Engel Amendment (#55) to the Farm Bill would make significant and urgently needed reforms to our international food aid system by creating more flexibility and ending the practice of monetization, while also saving taxpayer dollars by eliminating wasteful spending.

While U.S. food aid saves millions of lives, we know all too well that the system is flawed. Current law requires that our government ship the majority of our food aid from the U.S., which means that it can take many months to reach people who need it. And since we buy almost none of the food from farmers in the countries we're helping, our aid often undercuts local prices and even puts local farms out of business.

As you may recall, President Obama made recommendations in his 2014 budget proposal to address some of these challenges. The Royce-Engel Amendment essentially codifies the president's proposal into law by allowing 45% of U.S. food aid to be in the form of local

purchase, cash or vouchers. This flexibility would enable us to reach at least 4 million more people, with the same dollar amount, and would eliminate delivery delays of 3-4 months that are often the difference between life and death.

The amendment also ends the requirement that some portion of food aid be 'monetized' - a system through which in-kind food aid is donated to international development organizations, which in turn sell the food in local markets overseas to raise money for their development projects. Ending monetization creates the flexibility to use cash instead of commodities for important development projects financed through the food aid program.

A large coalition of groups support this amendment including AJWS, Oxfam, Bread for the World, Save the Children, CARE, Catholic Relief Services and many others. Think tanks across the ideological spectrum have also endorsed food aid reform, from the Heritage Foundation to the Center for American Progress.

I believe ending global hunger is a moral imperative and a fiscal priority. I urge you to vote YES on this amendment and to help make history on this issue.