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Position Paper

Farm Bill Implementation

Challenge – The fresh fruit and vegetable industry represents a vitally important segment of American agriculture. While the produce industry does not grow fruits and vegetables in every Congressional district, our industry is important to the good health of all Americans, as well as to our government’s efforts to prevent disease, reduce obesity and improve the well-being of our citizens. The federal government and Congress must consider all solutions to help the fruit and vegetable industry remain world leaders in food production and competitiveness.

Background – After nearly two years of debate, Congress has passed a new farm bill that will govern the nation’s agriculture laws for the next five years. In addition, this legislation will also regulate nutrition, conservation, research and energy programs. This bill authorizes \$289 billion in agriculture programs including \$209 billion for nutrition programs, \$35 billion for commodity programs and \$25 billion for conservation programs.

The law makes a tremendous investment in the specialty crop industries by recognizing the needs and priorities of fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, nursery and wine grape growers in the United States. In particular, this bill dedicates approximately \$3 billion in critical funding for specialty crop, pest and disease, nutrition, research and conservation priorities. Of particular note, is that none of this funding will go to direct payments or subsidies from the federal government but rather strongly support infrastructure investments and expand market opportunities to build a strong specialty crop industry.

Now that the Farm Bill has become law, United State Department of Agriculture (USDA) will begin the implementation process. This will be an important time to work with USDA and ensure that the specialty crop provisions included in the Farm Bill are implemented in a way that addresses the unique needs of domestic specialty crop producers, and ensures that implementation is in line with congressional intent. This will be an important opportunity to remind Congress of the broad support the specialty crop provisions garnered during the Farm Bill debate and that these investments must be maintained through the life of the Farm Bill in order to grow a vibrant fruit and vegetable industry.

Action – Fruit and vegetable growers, shippers and processors continue to endure food safety, plant pest and disease, global competition and trade challenges that may, in whole or in part, be resolved through greater investment in research and promotion. Most importantly, our industry needs research and development to be competitive both home and abroad. Congress decided that providing the specialty crop industry science-based tools to help address these challenges was well worth the investment of mandatory funds. For an industry that contributes well over \$50 billion to the gross receipts of U.S. agriculture, we must now ensure that Congress strongly supports an implementation of the Farm Bill by USDA that is based on the law and ensures federal resources are invested back into the industry through research, nutrition programs, pest and disease tools, and state block grant programs that increase market competitiveness for fruits and vegetables.