

Specialty Crop Priorities for the 2018 Farm Bill

Executive Summary

The specialty crop industry in the United States is a critical component of the overall agriculture economy. The production of fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, nursery, and greenhouse commodities accounts for over 44% of farmgate value for crops.

The specialty crop industry is united to advocate for a common set of priorities in the 2018 Farm Bill. A broad coalition of specialty crop organizations, known as the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance (SCFBA), representing U.S. growers and shippers have been working to forge mutual objectives for the Farm Bill, to assure a common platform across regions, commodities and other interests. United Fresh works to coordinate the activities of the Alliance and we will continue to work closely and collaboratively with allies in all specialty crops who share many of the following priorities, as well as other stakeholders across U.S. agriculture.

Specific Farm Bill Priorities

Invasive Pests and Disease - The specialty crop industry continues to support expedited and aggressive actions by the federal government, in cooperation with the industry and stake holders at the state and local levels, to eradicate and protect the domestic market from the increasing threat of exotic pests and diseases entering the United States. Section 10201 of the 2008 and 2014 Farm Bill has provided critical funding and direction for innovative initiatives to identify and mitigate offshore threats, and improve pest detection and rapid response. Policies established under both of these Farm Bills have provided the greatest opportunities for reduction in risk, establish a consistent and clear communication structure, and provide for problem resolution with built-in accountability. These programs should be continued to build on the success of the last 10 years.

Nutrition - The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program will reach more than 4 million low-income elementary school children nation-wide this coming school year. This highly effective program provides young students with a fresh fruit or vegetable snack every day at school and should be continued. The SCFBA also supports placing a high priority on Section 32 commodity purchases, the Department of Defense (DOD) Fresh program for schools, and incentives to help low-income families purchase and consume more fruits, vegetables, and tree nuts.

Research - The 2008 and 2014 Farm Bills included key provisions which dedicated research funding addressed industry priorities in specialty crop research and extension. The Specialty Crop Research Initiative (which should be the primary source for research funding) and the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program are both based on competitive processes, require stakeholder involvement, and have already had significant positive impacts. These investments must be sustained in the 2018 Farm Bill.

Specialty Crop Block Grants - The SCBG Program is a much needed effort to help specialty crop producers to balance the uncertainties of agriculture production with improvements to their products and the access consumers have to those products. This program must be maintained and Congress should work with the specialty crop sector to build on its success.

Trade - U.S. specialty crop growers face significant obstacles in the development of export markets for their commodities and unique challenges due to the perishable nature of our products. United Fresh strongly supports the continuation of two key programs, the Technical Assistance to Specialty Crops (TASC) and Marketing Access Promotion (MAP) programs, that address sanitary and phytosanitary, as well as marketing barriers to the export of U.S. specialty crops.