

Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance

Working to Make American Agriculture Stronger

SPECIALTY CROP FARM BILL CONFERENCE REPORT KEY HIGHLIGHTS

The Farm Bill Conference Report dedicates critical mandatory funding over the life of the Farm Bill to specialty crop priorities such as nutrition, research, pests and disease, trade assistance, conservation local competitiveness projects. In addition this conference report addresses important policy proposals that will help build a strong specialty crop industry in the United States. Below is a summary of some of the key funding and policy highlights.

Funding Highlights

- **\$1.02 billion** - Expands the Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Snack Program to all 50 states. The nationwide expansion of the Snack Program will develop life-long healthy eating habits for millions of children by providing fresh fruits and vegetables in our nation's schools.
- **\$466 million** – Enhances funding for “Specialty Crop Block Grants” that focus on local efforts to enhance producers’ ability to compete in the marketplace and provide consumers with safe, abundant food.
- **\$ 377 million** – Creates a new Pest and Disease Program focused on combating invasive pests and disease, which cost the economy billions of dollars a year. This program will be a joint collaborative effort between the USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services (APHIS) and state departments of agriculture.
- **\$250 million** – Provides the Department of Defense (DOD) Fresh Program which partners with USDA in a unique program to purchase and deliver fresh fruits and vegetable to schools and in schools.
- **\$230 million** – Establishes the Specialty Crop Research Initiative to develop and disseminate science-based tools to address the needs of specific crops and their regions. The research important priorities such as food safety, mechanization, genetics, plant breeding and pests and diseases.
- **\$200 million (per year)** – Maintains funding for the Market Access Program (MAP) which increases the availability and viability of U.S. specialty crops in foreign markets.
- **\$59 million** – Enhances critical trade assistance and market promotion tools that will grow international markets for specialty crops. Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops (TASC) has proven to be successful tool with identifying and removing trade barriers for specialty crop producers.
- **\$20 million** – Creates the National Clean Plant Network to provide a sustainable source of healthy planting stock for fruit trees, nut trees and grapevines. The production of clean planting stock for horticultural crops has been in jeopardy due to the lack of public funding and adversely impacts key horticultural crops.

Policy Highlights

- **Maintains integrity of U.S. planting flexibility policy.** Continues to maintain the planting flexibility safety net policy for fruit and vegetable farmers that ensures growers who receive federal payments, will not be able to also plant fruits and vegetables on that subsidized acreage.
- **Successfully adds “processing (packing), storing and transportation” to the approved list of on-farm income related to the AGI (adjusted gross income) conservation programs.** Many specialty crop producers also “process (including packing), store and transport” crops and were prevented from participating in conservation programs because their AGI exceeded the limits.
- **Prioritizes federal research activities for specialty crops.** USDA will collaborate with specialty crop producers and organizations to develop and implement applied research and extension initiatives funded and sponsored by the agency.
- **Expands purchases of fruits and vegetables under Section 32 program.** Increases the minimum threshold (currently at \$200 million per year) of Section 32 funds dedicated to fruit, vegetable and nut purchases and expands the Secretary’s purchase discretion to include value-added fruit, vegetable and nut products. Funding Levels: \$390 FY08; \$393 FY09; \$399 FY10; \$403 FY 11; \$406 FY12.
- **Requires the Secretary to conduct a census of specialty crops to assist in the development and dissemination of specialty crop information.**
- **Improves provision for technical assistance under conservation programs.** Includes provisions for specialty crop technical assistance in order to make sure specifications are complete and relevant. The provision seeks to ensure adequate technical assistance to specialty crop growers by directing the Secretary to develop programs that meet the needs of specialty crop growers using cooperative agreements with other federal agencies

Over the last three years, the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance (SCFBA) has urged Congress to make federal farm policy more equitable for the nation’s specialty crop producers. As a result, the Farm Bill Conference report dedicates approximately \$3 billion to important nutrition, research, pest and disease, trade, conservation and local competitiveness priorities. Our national coalition of more than 120 specialty crop organizations supports the passage of this Farm Bill.