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## **SPECIALTY CROP FARM BILL ALLIANCE ANNOUNCES FARM BILL PRIORITIES**

*More than 120 organizations urge Congress to support  
key nutrition, block grant and research programs*

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – The [Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance](#) (SCFBA), a national coalition of more than 120 specialty crop organizations, has announced its 2018 farm bill priorities focusing on programs for a healthier America heading into Wednesday’s U.S. House Agriculture Committee meeting on the Farm Bill. The SCFBA appreciates House Agriculture Committee Chairman Conaway recognizing the importance of specialty crops in the initial draft of the legislation.

The SCFBA legislative priorities include enhancing nutrition programs, continued support for the Specialty Crop Block Grant program, combatting invasive pests and diseases, and support for trade and research funding. In each case, these measures would assist the specialty crop industry’s ability to compete and grow in domestic and global markets.

Specialty crop production, including fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, nursery and greenhouse commodities, contributes significantly to the U.S economy, accounting for \$66 billion in farm gate value and 33 percent of farm cash receipts for crops.

The SCFBA was established to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crop agriculture and improve the health of Americans by broadening the scope of U.S. agricultural public policy. It is co-chaired by the Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association, the National Potato Council and Western Growers Association.

“Specialty crop producers across the nation are united in providing consumers with healthy eating options by expanding the consumption of fruits and vegetables, bolstering research and pest management and supporting grower initiatives to improve competitiveness,” said John Keeling, executive president and CEO of the National Potato Council. “For this work to continue, this next farm bill must address these priorities.”

Tom Nassif, president and CEO of Western Growers Association, said, “SCFBA is advocating for a common set of priorities with this next farm bill, reflecting mutual objectives of U.S. growers and shippers across regions and commodities. We look forward to working with our allies in all specialty crop organizations who share many of our priorities, as well as with U.S. agriculture stakeholders.”

Mike Stuart, president of the Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association, said, “We’re encouraged that lawmakers recognize the success of past farm bill investment in the specialty crop industry. We’re seeking their continued support for our growers who work every day to provide better access to higher quality and more affordable fruits and vegetables.”

Robert Guenther, senior vice president of United Fresh Produce Association, stated, “We are encouraged that support for fresh produce continues to be a priority for the committee. There are areas in this bill we would like to see improved, but now more than ever it will be vital for Congress to come together on both sides of the aisle in a bipartisan manner, which historically occurs to provide the support the industry needs.”

**In a letter to the House Agriculture Committee today, the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance urged the following actions:**

**Enhance funding for the Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI)** – The SCRI was established in 2008 to address the critical research needs of the specialty crop industry. Since then, 288 research projects for specialty crops have been funded, enhancing the industry’s competitive prominence in the domestic and international marketplace. SCRI is one of the most oversubscribed research programs; current funding allows for only 10 percent of the requested projects to be funded. ***SCFBA urges the House Agriculture Committee to dedicate \$105 million annually for the SCRI program.***

**Continue the Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops (TASC) program at a full \$9 million annually.** Authorized in the 2002 Farm Bill, TASC addresses technological barriers that prohibit or threaten the exports of U.S. specialty crops. TASC has been responsible for more than 275 grants to address these barriers even though it has only been funded at \$9 million. A new ruling by the Office of Management and Budget means all new programs will lose their baseline funding by Sept. 30. ***SCFBA urges the House Agriculture Committee to ensure full funding in a reauthorized farm bill or if the current farm bill is extended.***

**Increase funding to combat invasive pests and diseases.** The specialty crop industry strongly supports efforts to protect the domestic market from the increasing threat of harmful plant pests and diseases entering the United States. The farm bill has provided funding and direction for innovative initiatives that help identify and mitigate offshore threats and improve pest detection and rapid response. More than 1,700 projects have been funded since this program’s inception in the 2008 Farm Bill. ***SCFBA urges the House Agriculture Committee to continue supporting these programs at \$75 million annually, with the goal of enhancing its funding in five years by a modest \$7.5 million to fund the National Clean Plant Network.***

**Ensure healthy eating in low-income families.** The farm bill has funded the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program, which will reach more than 4 million low-income elementary students nationwide this year. ***SCFBA urges the House Agriculture Committee to maintain***

***the intent of the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program while clarifying all forms of fruits and vegetables are permissible only when there are hardships preventing access to fresh.***

In addition, the SCFBA supports continued funding for the increased consumption of fruits and vegetables among low-income consumers who participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), focused on retailers that operate year-round and have more accessible hours to maximize the opportunity for healthy food purchases. The Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentives (FINI) grant program focuses on SNAP families who spend 80 percent of their benefits with participating retailers. The SCFBA believes this program should only include fruits and vegetables. ***SCFBA supports the House Agriculture Committees efforts to increase FINI funding levels.***

**Continue strong funding of Specialty Crop Block Grants.** One of the key aspects of the last two farm bills was the extension of the Specialty Crop Block Grant program through fiscal year 2018. The program is a much-needed effort to help specialty crop producer's balance the challenges and uncertainties of agriculture production with improvements to their products and the access consumers have to those products.

**Increase access to foreign markets.** Specialty crop growers face significant obstacles in the development of export markets and unique challenges because of the perishable nature of their products. The Market Access Program (MAP) assists producers in their efforts to create, expand and maintain access to foreign markets. The Alliance strongly supports continuing key programs that address sanitary, phytosanitary and marketing barriers to the export of U.S. specialty crops. ***SCFBA encourages the House Agriculture Committee to increase funding for the MAP program in the next Farm Bill.***

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*The Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance is a national coalition of more than 120 organizations representing growers of fruits, vegetables, dried fruit, tree nuts, nursery plants and other products. The Alliance was established to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crop agriculture and improve the health of Americans by broadening the scope of U.S. agricultural public policy. For more information, visit [farmbillalliance.org](http://farmbillalliance.org).*