

Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance Announces 2018 Priorities

The Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance is a national coalition of more than 120 organizations representing growers of fruit, 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.

The specialty crop industry is united to advocate for a common set of priorities in the 2018 Farm Bill. The Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance which represents U.S. growers and shippers, has forged mutual objectives for the farm bill to assure a common platform across regions, commodities, and other interests. They work closely and collaborate with allies in all specialty crops who share priorities, as well as other stakeholders across U.S. agriculture.

Specific Farm Bill Priorities for 2018 include:

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 stakeholders at the state and local levels, to eradicate and protect the domestic market from the increasing threat of exotic plant pests and diseases entering the United States. Section 10201 of the 2008 and 2014 farm bills provided critical funding and direction for innovative initiatives to identify and mitigate offshore threats, and to improve pest detection and rapid response. Policies established under the farm bill provides the greatest opportunities for reduced risk, establish a consistent and clear communication structure, and provide for problem resolution with built-in accountability. They believe Congress should continue these important programs and build on their successes over the last 10 years.

Nutrition

A key nutrition program to highlight is the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program, which will reach more than 4 million low-income elementary schoolchildren nationwide 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. We also support a continued priority on Section 32 commodity purchases, the Department of Defense 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 that dedicated research funding and 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 and require stakeholder involvement, and they have already had significant positive impact. These investments must be sustained in the 2018 Farm Bill.

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 producers balance the uncertainties of agriculture production with improvements to their products and the access consumers have to those products. We strongly support maintaining this program and building on its success.

Trade

U.S. specialty crop growers face significant obstacles in the development of export markets for their commodities and unique challenges because of the perishable nature of our products. The alliance strongly supports continuing two key programs that address sanitary, phytosanitary, and marketing

barriers to the export of U.S. specialty crops: The Technical Assistance to Specialty Crops (TASC) and Marketing Access Promotion (MAP) programs.