

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 22, 2008

The Honorable Rose DeLauro
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Agriculture Appropriations
2362 A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jack Kingston
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro and Ranking Member Kingston:

As members who represent districts with significant specialty crop production we would like to thank you for recognizing the importance of maintaining mandatory funding levels as recently enacted into law through the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-234) for specialty crop programs in your Subcommittee mark of the FY2009 Agriculture Appropriations bill.

Specialty crops—including fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits and nursery products—are a critical part of our nation's agriculture industry, constituting nearly fifty percent of cash receipts. As you know, the Farm Bill was the result of a long negotiation process which represented great strides in bringing much needed equity among specialty crops and program crops. We thank you for understanding that these specialty crop programs represent the *primary means of assistance to specialty crop producers under the Farm Bill*, and as such, it is critically important that these key specialty crop initiatives be fully funded in their beginning stages and throughout the five-year term of the Farm Bill.

However, we are extremely troubled by funding levels for two important specialty crop programs in the Senate's mark of the FY2009 Agriculture Appropriations Bill (S. 3289). While we understand the difficult decisions that accompany the appropriations process, we cannot support such significant funding reductions. As you move into negotiations with your Senate counterparts to reconcile the many differences in the two versions of the FY2009 Agriculture Appropriations bills, we respectfully request that you preserve the mandatory funding levels for these programs as passed by the 2008 Farm Bill and maintained by the House version.

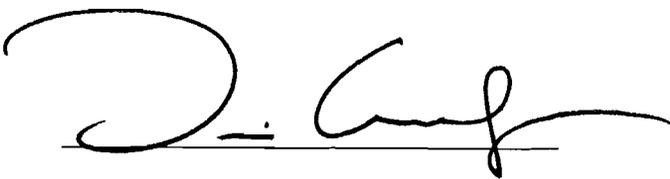
We are particularly concerned with the funding cuts in the Senate mark to two key specialty crop programs:

- Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) - Under Section 721, the Senate bill language limits spending on the Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) to \$36 million, effectively cutting \$14 million in mandatory spending approved by both the House and Senate in the 2008 Farm Bill less than four months ago. More importantly, the SCRI has proven to be extremely popular, even in its infancy. Over 270 grant applications were submitted for the FY2008 SCRI funding by specialty crop growers and associations, public and private colleges and universities and other research institutions. This overwhelming interest in the SCRI clearly shows an unmet need in dedicated federal funding for specialty crop research has persisted for far too long. A reduction of this size—nearly 30% of the total FY2009 funding for the program—will severely hamper the ability of the U.S. Department of Agriculture to promote specialty crop research nationwide.
- Specialty Crop Block Grant Program - The Senate mark also limits spending for the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program to \$44 million, cutting \$5 million from its mandatory spending level passed by the 2008 Farm Bill. The Specialty Crop Block Grant program is a proven, tested program that provides a federal-state partnership to enhance the competitiveness of fruits, vegetables, nut and horticulture crops. Grants may be used for promotion, nutrition, trade enhancement, food safety and security, increased innovation, improved efficiency and to reduce costs of distribution systems for specialty crops, among other things. Any reduction in the mandatory funding requirements in the Block Grant Program will seriously undermine the carefully negotiated specialty crop title of the 2008 Farm Bill.

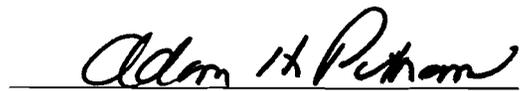
We thank you again for recognizing this important promise to specialty crop growers nationwide and we stand in strong support of retaining the mandatory spending levels for these two crucial programs in any conference negotiations that may come towards the end of the 110th Congress.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,



Michael H. Michael



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