

**Prepared Statement
by
William L. Brim
Co-Owner
Lewis Taylor Farms
Tifton, Georgia**

**Subcommittee on Horticulture, Research,
Biotechnology and Foreign Agriculture**

United States House of Representatives

April 24, 2013

Introduction

Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Schrader, and other members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to testify before your committee. My name is Bill Brim and I am the co-owner of Lewis Taylor Farms in Tifton, Ga. We are a diversified specialty crop operation, farming 450 acres of bell pepper, 550 acres of cantaloupes, 2000 acres of greens and broccoli, 500 acres of squash and 900 acres of cucumbers, 50 acres of tomatoes, and 350 acres of vegetables crops. We also produce 185 million vegetable seedlings and 35 million pine tree seedling in our 650,000 square feet of greenhouse operations. We also grow 350 acres of cotton and 250 acres of peanuts. I have been using the H2A program for our harvest and packing operations since 1998.

I am active in our industry's national trade association to help bring safe, healthy, affordable and great-tasting fruits and vegetables to the public. In this capacity I serve as a member of United Fresh Produce Association's Government Relations Council and will be joining the United Consolidated Board of Directors in May. United Fresh represents more than 1,700 growers, packers, shippers, fresh-cut processors, distributors and marketers of fresh fruits and vegetables accounting for the vast majority of produce sold in the United States. I also serve on the Board of the Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association and served as President of the association in 1997-98 and 2007-08. Our farm also strongly supports the efforts of the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance and their 120 organizations that represent the majority of specialty crops in the United States including fruits, vegetables, tree-nuts, wine-grape growers, nursery and landscape companies. This important coalition represents over 350 individual specialty crops across the United States.

Overview

After several opportunities to pass a new Farm Bill over the past 18 months, the hard work of this committee and our specialty crop industry seemed to have been put on hold. I am hopeful we can start where we left off back in the fall and move forward with a framework similar to that passed by this committee in July of last year. For specialty crops, the Farm Bill of 2008 and the Bill passed by your committee last July provided a tremendous investment in our producers by recognizing the needs and priorities of fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, nursery and wine grape growers in the United States.

From a produce grower's perspective, we continue to be driven and experience tremendous challenges in our business environment. We have worked hard to remain profitable, satisfy consumer demands, conform to and develop new technology, and compete in an increasingly

global market place. Our markets are highly volatile, yet we have never relied on traditional farm programs to sustain our industry. Instead, we look to each other to promote efficiency and reward market competition that so marks our industry.

In passing the Farm Bill recommendations by this committee back in the summer of 2012, I believe you were validating how the 2008 farm bill enhanced the competitiveness of the produce industry. I trust this committee will see the benefits our consumers and our farmers are receiving through your investments in the specialty crop industry. The following are key elements in the farm bill that I believe are critical to specialty crop farmers maintaining their competitiveness.

State-Block Grants

One of the key aspects of the 2008 farm bill with respect to specialty crops was the Specialty Crop Block Grant program. As you know, the sole purpose of this program is to promote the competitiveness of specialty crops, such as fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture and nursery crops. Over the life of the program, USDA reports that 2,500 projects have been funded that benefit the specialty crop in all 50 states and the projects have enhanced all aspects of growing and marketing specialty crops including research, plant and pest health, food safety and production.

For example, in my state of Georgia, block grant funds were used to promote Georgia specialty crops at a variety of trade shows across this country. At one of these trade shows, the growers participating reported collective new sales the following year at more than \$2 million. Funds were also used for research to provide pest management practices against fruit blotch on watermelons and economic studies of labor needs of Georgia specialty crop growers. In addition, funds were used for grower risk management and operations education plus food safety on-the-farm consultation.

The block grant program was designed to address grower needs at the state level. In Georgia these funds have been very successfully utilized to help specialty crop producers improve their operations and be more competitive and profitable.

In the July 2012 committee version of the Farm Bill passed by this committee, \$70 million per year was approved for the Block Grant program. We encourage that this subcommittee fight to maintain at least that level of funding in the 2013 Farm Bill.

Research

Research serves as both a foundation and a catalyst for growth in the advancement of any industry. The importance of specialty crop research was first recognized by the Specialty Crop Competitiveness Act of 2004. Congress, in this legislation and additional legislation gave USDA direction: "Research and extension grants may be made under this section for the purpose of improving the efficiency, productivity, and profitability of specialty crop production in the United States."

Subsequently, the 2008 Farm Bill included key provisions which for the first time dedicated significant funding to address industry priorities in specialty crop research and extension. The Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) was based on competitive processes, required stakeholder involvement, and had already had significant impact. Unfortunately SCRI did not have mandatory funding and with the 'extension' of the 2008 Farm Bill the program is no longer funded.

However, this committee, in passing a new Farm Bill has an opportunity to offer a brighter future to specialty crop growers. For our industry, successful research projects have the ability to reduce the future burden on the federal government through greater public access to healthy products, enhanced exports to growing consumer economies around the world, pest and disease resistant crops, reduced resource consumption and a variety of other beneficial applications. In order to offer these benefits and reach these goals, U.S. specialty crops urgently requires an enhanced commitment to research and extension activities focused on their priorities. We produce over 50% of the food we eat as American's but specialty crop research funding is nowhere near 50% of the funding USDA spends on agricultural research.

U.S. specialty crop producers and processors face mounting challenges to their economic vitality and long-term viability in a highly competitive global marketplace: These include high production input costs, extensive need for hand labor, new invasive pests and diseases, escalating regulatory demands, and unique domestic and international market requirements. Federal investment in research and extension addressing those challenges has not kept pace with the dynamic growth and needs of the nation's specialty crop industries. These investments must be increased and sustained in the new Farm Bill.

Nutrition Programs

The role of investment in federal nutrition programs cannot be overstated. This investment in nutrition programs can increase consumption of specialty crops such as fruits, vegetables, and tree nuts and benefit the specialty crop industry.

Currently, the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program reaches more than 4 million low-income elementary school children nation-wide. This program has proven to be highly successful by providing young students with a fresh fruit or vegetable snack every day at school and increases their overall consumption of a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables. This program is a WIN-WIN-WIN for agriculture and the produce industry, our kids and public health.

We support a strong continued focus in the Farm Bill on nutrition programs and increasing access and availability of fruits, vegetables and tree nuts. In particular, we support continued priority on the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, 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 and vegetables.

Pest and Disease Programs

The liberalization of international trade in agricultural commodities and commerce coupled with global travel has greatly increased the number of pathways for the movement and introduction of foreign, invasive agricultural pests and diseases. Economic damages from invasive pests and disease now exceeds \$120 billion annually.

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 U.S. through international commercial shipments of products, as well as the importation of agricultural contraband by vacationing travelers and commercial smugglers.

Section 10201 of the 2008 Farm Bill has provided critical funding and direction for innovative initiatives to identify and mitigate offshore threats, and improve pest detection and rapid

response in the U.S., thereby also improving domestic growers' ability to export product to other countries.

It is vital that the United States maintains its responsibility for the protection of the nation's food supply, our agricultural economy, and plant health. Therefore policies established under the 2008 Farm Bill provide the greatest opportunities for the reduction in risks, establish a consistent and clear communication structure, and provide for problem resolution with built-in accountability. We believe Congress should continue these important programs and build on their successes over the last four years.

International Market Access

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.

That is why we strongly support the continuation of two key programs that address sanitary and phyto-sanitary, as well as, marketing barriers to the export of U.S. specialty crops. Those programs are the Technical Assistance to Specialty Crops (TASC) and Marketing Access Promotion (MAP) programs, respectively.

Conservation

Today, United States consumers have affordable access to the most abundant and diverse food supply in the world. However, for the specialty crop industry, there continues to be mounting pressures of decreased availability of crop protection tools that can be used to provide the abundant and safe food supply the consumer demands. In turn, environmental regulations continue to put pressure on the industry's ability to be competitive in a world economy.

Because of these factors, Congress should consider assistance that encourages producers to invest in natural resource protection measures they might not have been able to afford without such assistance. Such programs would include EQIP, CSP, and WHIP.

Labor

While I realize farm labor is not in the jurisdiction of this committee, and the purpose of my testimony is to address the needs of the specialty crop industry as it relates to the Farm Bill, if I don't address my most pressing problem I will be doing you and me a disservice. If Congress does solve our immigration and farm labor situation you won't have to worry about a Specialty Crop title in the Farm Bill in the future. I encourage members of this committee and other members of the House to seriously consider the comprehensive immigration reform that will be introduced very soon. While I have used the H2A program for my labor needs for the past

fourteen years, the regulations, red tape, delays and legal services law suits have been horrendous. I hope you will give us a better guest worker program in the near future.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to working with the Committee as you begin your consideration of the next Farm Bill. Many of the pressures that specialty crop producers and my farm face are similar to those of producers of other commodities – increased regulation, high energy costs, transportation costs and input costs. However, the perishability of our crops requires that we take a different strategy and move our products to market quickly. It is very important that these unique characteristics be addressed through agricultural policies that drive domestic consumption, and expand foreign market access while investing in research, food safety, conservation and pest exclusion policies that benefit the members of the specialty crops industry.

I ask the Committee to build on the foundation and investment of the 2008 Farm Bill and ensure that our important issues are appropriately addressed as you move forward in the development of the 2013 Farm Bill. We certainly recognize the fiscal constraints facing the Congress, however, the many challenges facing our industry will only worsen if real and adequate policy reforms are not provided through a farm bill that appropriately meets the needs of the broad U.S. agriculture community.

Thank you.

WILLIAM L. BRIM

PRESIDENT AND OWNER • LEWIS TAYLOR FARMS, INC.

William (Bill) L. Brim, originally from Pelham, Georgia, began his agricultural background by participating in Future Farmers of America and other farm related youth organizations. Bill graduated from Pelham High School and Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College in Tifton, Georgia obtaining an Associate of Science Degree in Agriculture. Also, he served a tour of duty with the National Guard.

Bill began his agribusiness career working for several firms before returning to Tifton to pursue his lifelong goal of farming. In 1985 Bill, along with Ed Walker, purchased Lewis Taylor Farms, a well-respected plant company founded in 1951. With many new techniques being introduced into production, Bill realized technology was forcing the traditional bare-root transplant companies out of business. Over the next five years, Lewis Taylor Farms was transformed to a diversified transplant and vegetable production farm operation. Beginning with only 87,000 square feet of greenhouse production space in 1985, Lewis Taylor Farms now boasts over 649,000 square feet of production space. Annually, the greenhouse operation produces approximately 185 million vegetable transplants and 35 million pine seedlings.

Along with the transplant operation, Bill manages over 5,000 acres of vegetable production throughout the year, shipping to markets in both the United States and Canada. Lewis Taylor Farms is one of the largest diversified farm operations in Georgia. Additional companies have been established as well. Bio-E-Crops, their energy company, produces miscanthus grass for U.S. and international Markets. Spring Hill Produce is a state of the art packing and refrigeration facility enhancing the freshness of products such as broccoli, greens, cantaloupes and watermelons to our consumers.

Bill's progressive attitude has not only transformed the production aspects of Lewis Taylor Farms, he continues to strive for innovative solutions while maintaining a high professional level of management practices. In 1998, when the shortage of farm labor intensified even more, Lewis Taylor Farms was one of several farms in Georgia to organize a Farm Labor Association and are utilizing the government supervised legal H2A worker program. Lewis Taylor Farms is one of the first farms in Georgia to be recognized as a GAP certified farm, a third party food safety certification program, with Bill being instrumental in the establishment of the GAP program.

In addition to utilizing his leadership abilities as President of Lewis Taylor Farms, he unselfishly serves his community and industry in the following positions:

USDA National Advisory Fruit and Vegetable Committee	2006 – 2008, 2008 - 2010
Tift County Board of Education	
Vice Chair and Board Member	1988 - 1994
Tift County Farm Bureau	
Board of Director	1990 - 2012
Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association	
President	1996-1999, 2008 - 2009
Board of Directors	1996 - 2013
Legislative Committee Chairman	1998 – 2002, 2006 – 2011
Sponsorship Committee Chairman	2007 - 2008
Labor Committee	2009 – 2011
National Council of Agricultural Employers	
Board of Directors	1999 - 2003
H2A & Immigration Committee	1999 - 2003
Georgia Department of Labor Advisory Committee	
Chairman	1996 – 1998
H2A Advisory Committee	1996 – 2012
Georgia Agri-Leaders Charter Member	1988
Georgia Grower’s Association	
H2A Labor Group, Vice President	1998 – 2000
United Fresh Produce Association	
GR Council	2007 – 2013
Grower-Shipper Board	2010 – 2013
University of Georgia, College of Agriculture	
Dean’s Advisory Council	1999 – 2003, 2004 – 2011
Chairman	2001 – 2002
Tift County Extension Advisory Council	2006 – 2011
USA Farmers – Washington, DC	
Board of Directors	2011 – 2013
Eastern Cantaloupe Growers Association	
President	2013

Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Required Witness Disclosure Form

House Rules* require nongovernmental witnesses to disclose the amount and source of Federal grants received since October 1, 2010.

Name: William L. Brim - Tifton, GA.

Organization you represent (if any): _____

1. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) you have received since October 1, 2010, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract. House Rules do NOT require disclosure of federal payments to individuals, such as Social Security or Medicare benefits, farm program payments, or assistance to agricultural producers:

Source: N/A Amount: _____

Source: _____ Amount: _____

2. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) the organization has received since October 1, 2010, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract:

Source: N/A Amount: _____

Source: _____ Amount: _____

Please check here if this form is NOT applicable to you: _____

Signature: William L. Brim

* Rule XI, clause 2(g)(5) of the U.S. House of Representatives provides: "Each committee shall, to the greatest extent practicable, require witnesses who appear before it to submit in advance written statements or prepared testimony, and to limit their initial presentations to the committee to brief summaries thereof. In the case of a witness appearing in a nongovernmental capacity, a written statement or prepared testimony shall include a certification and a disclosure of the amount and source of any agency and program of each Federal grant or program thereof or contract or subcontract thereof received during the current fiscal year or either of the two previous fiscal years by the witness or by any entity represented by the witness."

PLEASE ATTACH DISCLOSURE FORM TO EACH COPY OF TESTIMONY.