

Testimony by Ralph Child on the 2012 Farm Bill  
Provided for the House Agriculture Committee  
Field Hearing – Saranac Lake, New York  
March 9, 2012

My name is Ralph Child. I grow 300 acres each of seed potatoes and leafy greens in Malone, New York. I am active in the Empire State Potato Growers and the National Potato Council. Both organizations are active members of the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance (SCFBA)—a coalition of more than 100 specialty crop associations, companies, and cooperatives across the United States. I want to highlight the importance of several key issues included in the farm bill and a couple issues that while beyond the scope of the farm bill remain critical to my continued success as a specialty crop grower in Upstate New York.

Prior to the 2008 Farm Bill, the needs and concerns of specialty crop producers were not considered while establishing national farm policy. The inclusion in the 2008 Farm Bill of specialty crop programs designed to improve industry competitiveness was an important first step in making modern farm programs accurately reflect the mix of agriculture in the United States. Importantly, specialty crop producers requested federal support for industry programs that were designed to maintain and improve competitiveness and not to provide compensation to growers nor to distort the specialty crop marketplace.

Research is critically important to our industry's ability to continue to improve our productivity and to make nutritious fruits and vegetables available to consumers as economically as possible. Improvements in our nation's health are directly linked to expanding the availability and consumption of more fruits and vegetables. The 2008 Farm Bill established two important programs that are producing research results that meet key needs for growers. The Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) provides competitive funding for multidisciplinary, multistate research projects that address critical industry needs. These are big projects with big promise to solve big problems. Since specialty crop production is so regionally diverse, Congress also wisely included the Specialty Crop Block Grant (SCBG) program in the 2008 Farm Bill to address local needs. This program as administered by the state departments of agriculture is meeting the priorities of smaller growers like me whose needs for research and technical assistance might otherwise be overlooked.

Increased access to foreign markets is also vital to the overall health of our industry. Many of our global competitors are able to produce and deliver specialty crops in a more cost effective way due to assistance from their own governments. Programs that enable U.S. producers to gain a foothold in a developing market are essential to growing our businesses domestically and contributing to a strong economy. The Market Access Program (MAP) allows U.S. growers to do just that. MAP funds have enabled potato growers in the United States to market and export potatoes and potato products to significant economies all over the world, including the top export markets of Japan, China, Korea, and Mexico. The U.S. potato industry is able to complement the funding it receives through MAP with other trade promoting programs including the Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops (TASC) program. TASC is crucial to maintaining market access in the face of sanitary and phytosanitary issues that can threaten to block U.S. specialty crops from critical markets. The value of TASC to the specialty crop industry cannot be overstated.

Like any part of agriculture and perhaps even more so, specialty crops are susceptible to plant pests and disease. Pests and disease can cut yield, hurt quality, and if the pest is a quarantine pest or a highly regulated pest, it can completely close off markets for our products. An example of a regulated pest that has the potential to wreak havoc on market access and devastate our local economy is the Golden Nematode. Since the quarantine is working, we are able to conduct business without serious consequences. With proper pest and disease programs, many of these issues can be identified early and possibly avoided altogether. A significant step forward for our industry in the 2008 Farm Bill was the increased investment in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). The Plant Pest and Disease Management and Disaster Prevention program allows APHIS to address plant pests early and proactively. Although it is not addressed directly in the Farm Bill I do want to call the Committee's attention to the need for adequate appropriations for the APHIS line item that funds the Golden Nematode Program in New York. That funding is important both to New York potato growers as well as potato growers across the U.S.

Finally, with the expected movement in the 2012 Farm Bill toward a reliance on insurance products and away from direct and counter cyclical payments, there needs to be a thoughtful discussion about the crop insurance needs in the specialty crop industry. For specialty crop growers, annual planting decisions are based upon market indicators. There is a significant risk of distorting or destabilizing markets when an incentive exists to make planting decisions based on crop or revenue insurance instead of those market indicators. I hope the Committee will look closely at the potential market distorting impacts of insurance programs using price or revenue loss triggers.

Major policy strides were made in the 2008 Farm Bill for specialty crops and we hope to build on those strides in the 2012 Farm Bill. Without a skilled agricultural workforce, the best Farm Bill policies will not have their intended effect. The specialty crop industry is labor intensive. A skilled labor force on a seed potato and leafy green farm is not very accessible to begin with and programs like mandatory e-Verify without an agricultural worker program would have extraordinarily negative consequences to growers like me. Since I farm close to the northern border, I understand firsthand the consequences of an enforcement-only immigration policy. I currently participate in the H-2A program out of necessity, not because I think it is a viable long-term option. Any desire to further invest in my business is dampened by concerns about the long-term direction of immigration policy. A flexible, realistic, and market-based agricultural guest worker program would enable me to more effectively do what I do best. I urge you to work with your colleagues in the House of Representatives to approve a comprehensive immigration policy that provides an opportunity for existing agriculture workers to earn a legal status, creates a viable guest worker program and secures our nation's borders.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this committee. I respectfully request that the entirety of my remarks which are more specific on key issues, be included in the record.

### **Specialty Crop Research Initiative**

The specialty crop industry accounts for half the farm gate value of plant-based agriculture in the United States. While many of our global competitors enjoy state subsidization, U.S. producers prefer support and funding for essential programs that enable the industry to be competitive at home and in foreign markets. The Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) has emerged as an essential tool to foster competitiveness. In the U.S. potato industry for example, \$2,381,759 provided by an SCRI grant allowed researchers from USDA's Agricultural Research Service in Ithaca and cooperators from across the country to develop and implement management strategies for Potato Virus Y as well as the eradication of necrotic variants of the virus that were introduced into the United States. Other research priorities have also been addressed through SCRI, including Zebra Chip research with project leaders in Texas and the development of varieties of potatoes with lower acrylamide as a result of research directed from Wisconsin. The program has been so successful and universally popular in the specialty crop industry that specialty crop producers recommend increasing the funding to \$100 million per year of mandatory funds. Under current farm law, SCRI is not included in baseline funding and will not continue in the next farm bill unless action is taken to address funding. The effectiveness of SCRI could be improved by allowing greater flexibility in the administration of the program. Specific improvements include reduction of the 100 percent matching requirements, increasing stakeholder input, the inclusion of federal and state marketing orders and commissions for consideration, and review by industry stakeholders for relevance prior to the scientific review.

### **Specialty Crop Block Grants**

The Specialty Crop Block Grant (SCBG) program is also of critical importance to the specialty crop industry by empowering regionally-specific research to be conducted on a state-by-state and multi-state basis. In 2011, there were 10 projects valued at a total of just over \$1 million awarded in the state of New York, including extensive partnerships with researchers at Cornell University. Nationwide, about \$55 million for the SCBG projects will be available in 2012. The

program's effectiveness is clearly understood by the specialty crop industry, and with a few minor improvements could be even more responsive to the needs of the industry, including grower-level projects, strengthened definitions and the use of designated funds according to those definitions, increased emphasis on competitiveness and expansion of multi-state projects. Based on this experience, the specialty crop industry supports increasing funding by \$5 million per year. This would translate to \$350 million in mandatory funding over five years.

### **Market Access Program**

The specialty crop industry is heavily reliant upon a robust export economy for continued success in the United States. For example, one in six rows of potatoes grown in the country today are destined for foreign markets, or more than double the amount we exported in 2000. One of the most important tools in this success story is the Market Access Program (MAP), which provided \$6.1 million in funding for the U.S. Potato Board, the national marketing and promotion organization for the U.S. potato industry. Since 2000, potato exports to countries targeted with MAP funds has grown by 68%. Exports are a major reason that the agricultural economy has been so strong in recent years and a much-needed bright spot during the current national economic downturn. Not only does it make economic sense as an investment, it also allows U.S. growers to more effectively compete with their global competitors, many of whom enjoy significant advantages in the form of subsidization. As you might expect, MAP enjoys an immense level of popularity within the specialty crop industry and the Alliance fully supports continued mandatory funding at the current level of \$200 million per year.

### **Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops**

Considering the significant stake that the specialty crop industry has in the export market, the industry is always looking out for technical barriers to trade that can close down markets for sanitary and phytosanitary reasons. The Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops (TASC) program is the vehicle to address these trade barriers in a timely fashion. TASC was originally designed to be a nimble and effective way to help the private sector resolve technical barriers

to trade. These barriers can emerge unexpectedly and require fast action to prevent market closures and trade disruptions in established markets. Given the value and effectiveness of TASC, the Alliance recommends continued mandatory funding at \$9 million per year.

### **Plant Pest and Disease Management and Disaster Prevention**

Commonly referred to as Section 10201, the Plant Pest and Disease Management and Disaster Prevention program in the 2008 Farm Bill allows funds to be used for early plant pest detection and surveillance, for threat identification and mitigation of plant pests and diseases, and for technical assistance in the development and implementation of audit-based certification systems and nursery plant pest risk management systems. This program is highly effective and allows USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service to address potential pest and disease issues proactively rather than reactively. Section 10201 is currently funded at a level of \$50 million per year and the Alliance recommends \$75 million in mandatory funding per year.

### **National Clean Plant Network**

The National Clean Plant Network (NCPN), or Section 10202, is a program also administered by USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service under which a partnership of clean plant centers are organized to provide high quality asexually propagated plant material free of targeted plant pathogens and pests that cause economic loss to protect the environment and ensure the global competitiveness of specialty crop producers. NCPN is funded through 2012 at \$5 million per year but does not have baseline funding in the next Farm Bill. The Alliance recommends mandatory funding of \$10 million per year for the National Clean Plant Network.

Committee on Agriculture  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Information Required From Nongovernmental Witnesses

House rules require nongovernmental witnesses to provide their resume or biographical sketch prior to testifying. If you do not have a resume or biographical sketch available, please complete this form.

1. Name: Ralph Child
2. Organization you represent: Empire State Potato Growers
3. Please list any occupational, employment, or work-related experience you have which add to your qualification to provide testimony before the Committee:  
I have been owner/operator of Childstock Farms, Inc since 1982. I produce seed potatoes and leafy greens in Malone, NY.
4. Please list any special training, education, or professional experience you have which add to your qualifications to provide testimony before the Committee:  
Former president of Empire State Potato Growers  
Current director from NY on the National Potato Council  
Former board member, New York Farm Bureau
5. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list the capacity in which you are representing that organization, including any offices or elected positions you hold: Currently, I am a member of Empire State Potato Growers. I do not serve as an officer or in a elected position.

PLEASE ATTACH THIS FORM OR YOUR BIOGRAPHY TO EACH COPY OF TESTIMONY.

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, 2009.

Name: Ralph Child

Organization you represent (if any): Empire State Potato Growers

1. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) you have received since October 1, 2009, 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: None 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, 2009, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract:

Source: None Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

Source: \_\_\_\_\_ Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Signature: Ralph Child

\* 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 of proposed 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 of proposed testimony shall include a curriculum vitae and a disclosure of the amount and source (by agency and program) of each Federal grant (or subgrant 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.