

Statement of Justin Parnagian before the United States House of
Representatives Agricultural Committee
May 3, 2010
Fresno, California

Good morning, Chairman Peterson, Ranking member Lucas, Congressman Boswell, Congressman Conaway, Congressman Costa and Congressman Cardoza. My name is Justin Parnagian and I am an employee as well as a member of the Fowler Packing Company family. My grandparents, Sam and Gladys Parnagian, who were already farmers in the area, started Fowler Packing Company less than a decade after World War II. My father, Dennis Parnagian, along with his brothers, joined the family business after completing their formal educations and has helped grow our company continuously for more than fifty years. I am proud to be part of the latest generation actively growing, selling and shipping healthy fruits all around the United States and the globe. We very much appreciate the House Agriculture Committee and all of you taking the time and making the effort to be here in Central California; an area, as you know, that is arguably the most productive agricultural region in the world. We look forward to the continuing dialogue as it relates to the discussion and the formation of the 2012 farm bill.

While it truly does seem such a short time ago we were discussing the 2008 farm bill, those of us in production agriculture in California very much appreciate your foresight in holding these hearings at this early point of the

process. As a specialty crop producer who grows fresh grapes, tree fruit and citrus, I was particularly gratified that the current farm bill historically recognized for the first meaningful time the importance of specialty crops in improving the quality of life for all Americans. Due to the focus and resources of the current bill, we better understand the importance of fruits and vegetables and their role in providing needed nutrition and fighting obesity. We applaud the current efforts of First Lady Michelle Obama and her childhood obesity initiative appropriately named “Let’s Move” and the ability of the farm bill to assist in providing funding for healthier diets for our youth as evidenced by the expansion of the Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program to all 50 states.

However as well all know, the 2008 farm bill did not stop just at nutrition but looked to improve the overall competitiveness of specialty crops by providing critical trade assistance and market promotion tools that help grow international markets; expanded research and APHIS initiatives to combat invasive pests and diseases; invested in the latest research to make the nation’s food supply safer, more economical, better tasting and nutritious; promoted the conservation of our agricultural resources and expanded the funding for state specialty crop competitiveness projects in all 50 states. We believe we are on the right track with these kinds of investments in that they provide true value for all of our citizens but realizing the fiscal and budgetary challenges our country now faces we are even more committed to

analyzing and assuring that all of these programs provide the tangible returns that will guide the allocation of resources under the next farm bill. I can tell you from personal knowledge of the success of such programs as EQIP that help on our conservation and environmental efforts, TASC that assists in developing markets for California tree fruit in Mexico working in conjunction with the California Grape and Tree Fruit League, and MAP funds that help promote our products around the world.

As we move forward in the 2012 farm bill discussion, there remains clear benefits to increase consumer education and awareness in consuming fruits and vegetables. We also need to recognize the importance, from many viewpoints but particularly that of national security, of the production of a domestic food supply. We will again require a farm bill that will help our competitiveness, strengthen our research efforts, enhance our conservation programs and encourage investment and efficiency in all agricultural production sectors.

But in addition we will also need to address developing issues that look to negatively impact the true sustainability of California agriculture and its ability to produce that domestic food supply. These include the lack of sound science connected with biological opinions related to the Endangered Species Act and the resulting reductions of water and plant health material supplies. I would hope that USDA would assist in advocating on behalf of

agriculture in regard to these issues with the Environmental Protection Agency as well as the Department of Interior and to work with NRCS to provide additional and more efficient water supplies. If we do not address these concerns properly, the chances that we will continue to outsource an increasing percentage of our fruits and vegetables from other countries such as China will only grow.

We look forward to providing specific and detailed examples and working with you through this very important process. Thank you very much again for taking the time to be here today.