



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

SPECIALTY CROPS

Specialty crops play a crucial role in the success of U.S. agriculture; however, the diversity among specialty crops—ranging from fruits and vegetables to tree nuts, nursery crops, and floriculture—has previously made the development of the specialty crop safety net particularly challenging.

The Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2024 makes significant investments in the specialty crop industry by providing over \$1 billion for programs that support specialty crop research, enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops, and protect specialty crops from damaging pests and diseases. Additionally, the bill makes changes to programs across titles to improve program delivery for specialty crop producers.

Specialty Crop Research Initiative

- The Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) is a competitive grant program that provides resources for research and extension projects for the specialty crop industry. The bill increases mandatory funding for SCRI to \$175 million per year, a \$95 million increase per year from the 2018 Farm Bill. The bill also gives the Secretary the authority to waive the matching funds requirement for SCRI.

Specialty Crop Mechanization and Automation

- Specialty crops are very labor-intensive, and the availability of a stable workforce has long been one of the greatest challenges facing specialty crop growers. Research to promote the development of mechanization and automation technologies for the specialty crop industry remains a top priority. The bill reserves \$20 million per year from SCRI for a new Specialty Crop Mechanization and Automation Research and Extension Program.

Citrus Disease

- Citrus greening remains a serious threat to domestic citrus production. Despite significant investments over the past decade, the disease continues to spread to citrus trees in Florida, Texas, Arizona, and California and yields continue to decline. As such, the bill reserves \$25 million per year from SCRI to continue funding the Emergency Citrus Disease Research and Extension Program. The bill also reauthorizes the Citrus Disease Subcommittee of the National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics Advisory Board.

Plant Pest and Disease Management and Disaster Prevention Program

- The Plant Pest and Disease Management and Disaster Prevention Program (PPDMDPP) is essential in safeguarding American agriculture by preventing, detecting, and mitigating invasive pests and diseases. The bill increases mandatory funding for PPDMDPP to \$90 million per year, a \$15 million increase per year from the 2018 Farm Bill.

Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

- Since its creation, the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) has successfully enhanced the competitiveness of the specialty crop industry. The bill increases mandatory funding for SCBGP to \$100 million per year, a \$15 million increase per year

from the 2018 Farm Bill and directs State program administrators to consult with specialty crop producers when setting priorities for the program.

Market Access

- The bill doubles the funding for both the Market Access Program (MAP) and the Foreign Market Development Program (FMD), allowing for greater market expansion and trade promotion for U.S. specialty crop producers. The Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops (TASC) program and Emerging Markets Program (EMP) are also reauthorized. Through these robust promotion programs, the bill mitigates global food insecurity while providing producers new markets, improving local economies, and lessening the damage of the Biden Administration's ineffective trade agenda.
- After public notice and comment, requires the Secretary to submit a report to Congress detailing the policies or practices of foreign countries that act as significant barriers to specialty crop exports or those that enhance the competitiveness of imported specialty crops with domestic producers.

Nutrition

- Increases funding for the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP), improves year-round availability of incentives through the use of all forms of produce (frozen, fresh, canned, and dried), and corrects the inequities in program availability by waiving the federal match in persistent poverty counties.
- Reauthorizes the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program.
- Ensures USDA will continue to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables and other specialty crops for distribution to schools and service institutions.
- Reauthorizes and expands the offerings of the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP).
- Establishes a food box pilot program designed to supplement, not supplant, the nutrition of low-income households, expand the capacity of faith-based and community-based organizations, and support rural communities who lack access to traditional channels of food distribution.
- Increases funding for The Emergency Food Assistance Program's Farm to Food Bank Project.

Tree Assistance Program (TAP)

- The bill makes the Tree Assistance Program more effective by lowering the plant mortality threshold and expanding eligible crops and increases producer access to critical disaster assistance.

Expanding Crop Insurance Access for Specialty Crop Growers

- To allow the needs of specialty crop producers to be heard, the bill creates an advisory committee to provide counsel to the Risk Management Agency (RMA) on issues related to specialty crop insurance policies.
- The bill improves Whole Farm Revenue Protection (WFRP) policies by requiring an annual review of limitations and increasing the overall coverage cap to 90%.
- Research and development on the creation of multiple policies related to specialty crops.

Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) Limitations

- The bill improves access to disaster and conservation programs for specialty crop producers by creating a waiver that eliminates AGI limitations for participants that receive 75% or more of their income from agriculture.