

**Testimony of Mrs. Dana Brennan, Grimmway Farms,  
on behalf of the International Fresh Produce Association**

**U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture  
“An Examination of the State of the Specialty Crop Industry”  
September 16, 2025, 10:00 a.m. ET**

Thank you, Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Committee. My name is Dana Brennan, and I serve as Vice President of Corporate Affairs for Grimmway Farms, based in Bakersfield, California. I have been fortunate enough to work for Grimmway for seven years and was born and raised in Kern County, which proudly holds the title of the nation's #1 agriculture-producing county. Additionally, I am honored to serve as the Chair of the International Fresh Produce Association's United States Public Policy Committee, the organization I am proudly representing today. IFPA is the largest and most diverse association serving the entire fresh produce and floral supply chain worldwide and the only one to integrate advocacy and industry-facing support seamlessly. IFPA proudly represents member companies, from modest family businesses to large corporations, throughout the fresh fruit and vegetable supply chain, including growers, shippers, fresh-cut processors, wholesalers, distributors, retailers, food service operators, industry suppliers, and allied associations.

Headquartered in Kern County, Grimmway Farms traces its roots to a roadside produce stand started by the Grimm Brothers in the 1960s. Today, Grimmway is a global produce leader – one of the biggest carrot producers out there and also one of the top organic growers in the United States. We take our mission seriously—a commitment to bring fresh, healthy, and safe produce to communities around the world as we invest in and care for the earth's natural resources and our family of employees.

Today, we produce more than 135 seasonal and year-round products, distributed worldwide - including 65 USDA-certified organic commodities, under brands such as Cal-Organic and Bunny-Luv. Those crops are grown on over 40,000 acres of conventional ground and 55,000 acres of prime organically certified ground throughout California, Arizona, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Colorado, Georgia, and Florida.

On average, Grimmway is running upwards of 10 million pounds of fresh carrots per day through our facilities, six days a week, year-round. Those facilities are in California, the Pacific Northwest, and the Southeast United States.

That work could not have been done without our incredible family of employees. More than 6,000 jobs are dependent on our company's success, including direct labor, contract labor, and H-2A labor.

At Grimmway, we recognize the vital importance of providing wholesome food. We are proud to play a role in nourishing children in schools, supporting families at the dinner table, and serving

communities worldwide. Much of our work could not be done without the support of Farm Bill programs.

Fresh produce is a cornerstone of both American agriculture and public health. It is a tremendous economic engine, contributing billions annually to U.S. agricultural output. Beyond economics, we provide the healthiest foods available—essential to combating diet-related diseases and improving public health.

But this vital sector is under siege. Regulatory overreach, labor shortages, and outdated policies threaten our ability to grow, harvest, and deliver fresh food. These challenges are not theoretical—they are very real, and they threaten the viability of many U.S. producers.

### **The Farm Bill: A Lifeline for Specialty Crops**

As a team member of Grimmway Farms and a volunteer leader at the IFPA, I've seen firsthand how U.S. agricultural policy has evolved and how it continues to impact different segments of our industry in very different ways.

When the Great Depression hit, the federal government began to shape farm policy in earnest, stepping in to stabilize supply and prices for major staple crops of the time, namely corn, wheat, cotton, and rice. These became the foundation of what are now known as “program crops” under the Farm Bill. Over time, the bill expanded to include conservation initiatives and crop insurance tools tailored primarily to these commodities.

With each Farm Bill reauthorization, adjustments have been made to further refine pricing and supply mechanisms for program crops. However, growers of other crops, such as fruits, vegetables, and other high-value, labor-intensive commodities, were largely left to navigate the volatility of the marketplace on their own. These crops were eventually categorized as “specialty crops,” now officially defined to include fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops (including floriculture).

Despite their critical role in public health and the broader food supply chain, specialty crops have historically received limited support through traditional federal safety nets, particularly in areas like crop insurance. It's a dynamic that continues to challenge our sector and one we believe must evolve to reflect the modern realities of American agriculture.

We want to extend our appreciation to the Chairman and members of Congress who helped pass much-needed funding for many Farm Bill programs of significance to our industry earlier this year. Although the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA) made significant investments in programs that support the family farms producing U.S.-grown specialty crops, the law does not specify the purposes and parameters of those investments and omits significant policy proposals that specialty crop growers desperately need to enhance their competitiveness.

As we move into the final stretch of Farm Bill negotiations for 2025, the specialty crop industry remains focused on ensuring that federal farm policy reflects the diversity and complexity of modern American agriculture.

### **Farm Bill: Specialty Crop Farm Production Priorities**

The fresh sector is an active leader in the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance (SCFBA). My testimony references many SCFBA farm bill priorities, and IFPA strongly supports and incorporates, without direct reference, all SCFBA priorities. Specialty crops represent hundreds of billions of dollars in farm-gate crop value, yet they received just 0.5% of funding in the 2018 Farm Bill. The next farm bill must invest robustly and more equitably in specialty crop production to maintain a reliable, affordable domestic food supply.

We call on Congress to:

1. **Expand research and development:** In crop protection and pest management, including support for the IR-4 program, while investing in applied research on mechanization and automation for specialty crops to ease the tremendous cost and liability of labor on the farm—the single largest concern for fresh produce growers, which often exceeds 50% of total expenses.

Until laws and regulations around labor, immigration, taxation, environmental standards, food safety, crop protection, and trade are more aligned with the day-to-day realities of family farming, the most reliable path forward for specialty crop production comes down to one key principle: innovation.

One of the most impactful innovations needed on today's farms is increased mechanization. With the labor pool shrinking at an unsustainable rate, investment in equipment, robotics, and other advanced tools is essential to help fill the gap. Without bold, sustained efforts to accelerate agricultural technology development, we risk losing a significant portion of our nation's specialty crop production.

There has never been a greater need for accelerated innovation leaps in specialty crop production. To get the most bang for the buck, public-private partnerships in the Farm Bill should emphasize addressing mechanization. In California, the land-grant university system has played a pivotal role in advancing labor-saving agricultural technologies. UC Davis' Department of Biological and Agricultural Engineering has a strong legacy of innovation in specialty crop mechanization, including the development of the field harvester that revolutionized processing tomato production.

Closer to home, at Grimmway Farms, we're always exploring new ways to innovate. Right now, depending on the crop, we're using automation and precision agriculture in the field—from planting all the way through to harvest.

2. **Reform and Modernize the Safety Net:** While specialty crop growers have demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of severe weather, volatile markets, labor shortages, and mounting regulatory pressures, access to effective risk management tools continues to lag. Unlike major commodity crops, which benefit from well-established and widely utilized insurance programs, many specialty crop growers still lack access to viable, tailored risk management options.

Congress must prioritize risk management solutions that address the full spectrum of U.S. agriculture, encompassing both large and small farms, as well as row crops and specialty

crops, in the most efficient and cost-effective manner possible. Most fresh produce growers currently lack access to affordable and effective crop insurance. The USDA must be directed and empowered to develop a better system for specialty crops and implement it quickly. Specialty crop growers are among the most vulnerable to natural disasters, and we are just as dramatically impacted by market price fluctuations as our neighbors in the row sector. We have also learned that we cannot rely on timely support from disaster aid when disaster strikes. Congressional gridlock means relief comes too little and too late. We want better options for managing production risks and protecting our businesses.

3. **Update and streamline existing specialty crop programs:** As mentioned earlier, organics is a large part of Grimmway's production and a growing sector in the specialty crop industry. In 2019, 58 percent of organic sales came from crops, primarily led by vegetables and fruits (including berries and tree nuts), representing \$9 billion in sales. With the growing importance of the organic production sector in specialty crops and increasing participation throughout the supply chain, the industry continues to collaborate with other stakeholders on a range of initiatives aimed at improving the National Organic Program.

Additionally, Congress should establish a transparent process by which USDA solicits input directly from stakeholders every five years on what, if any, organic standards need updating. The agency should then publish a list of priorities for regulatory action and follow its existing process and procedures to execute on that plan.

4. **Promote Produce at Home:** Staying competitive in today's market is proving to be difficult for farmers. While individual vegetable growers may succeed in getting their products to market, driving broader market expansion and increasing consumer demand remains a significant challenge—largely due to the fragmented nature of specialty crop production. Domestic vegetable products are competing with lower-cost imports and processed alternatives that often serve as “like” substitutes in the eyes of consumers. Questions have been raised about whether USDA has the statutory authority to establish and administer a domestic promotion program to help address these competitive pressures. To that end, Congress should reaffirm that USDA has the statutory authority to conduct domestic promotion activities.

## **Nutrition: The Path to a Healthier America**

Only 1 in 10 Americans meets the recommended fruit and vegetable intake. The fresh produce industry is ready to help reverse this trend.

We call on Congress to:

- **Incentivize produce consumption in SNAP and WIC**
- **Expand online SNAP access**
- **Make the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) option available to more schools**
- **Ensure USDA procurement includes a diverse range of fresh produce**

## **Trade: Better Access, Fewer Barriers**

Fresh produce is one of North America's most actively traded commodities. Yet, non-tariff barriers, such as excessive residue limits and packaging standards, block U.S. exports.

We are grateful for the funds recently appropriated and support future funding designated for specialty crops under the following:

- **Market Access Program (MAP)**
- **Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops (TASC)**
- **Assisting Specialty Crop Exports (ASCE)**

These programs help U.S. growers compete globally and ensure consumers have access to fresh, affordable food.

### **Conclusion**

The fresh produce sector is essential to America's health, economy, and food security. However, we cannot survive without swift, decisive federal action.

We ask this Committee and the Administration to:

- **Support specialty crops in the Farm Bill**
- **Invest in innovation**
- **Address labor and regulatory policies**
- **Ensure fair trade and access to more markets**

It has been an honor to be here today. The specialty crop industry is a powerful force in feeding our nation and supporting our economy, and today's hearing reflects just how important this work is. Together, we can secure the future of American agriculture and ensure every American has access to safe, nutritious, and affordable food.

On behalf of Grimmway, I want to thank the Committee for dedicating so much time and attention to specialty crops in America. We deeply value your commitment, and we look forward to continuing to work together to strengthen the industry and ensure that future generations have access to healthy, affordable fresh produce.