



**AMERICAN AGRICULTURE.
STRONGER TOGETHER.**

December 18, 2024

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
United States Senate

The Honorable G.T. Thompson
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
United States Senate

The Honorable David Scott
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture
United States House of Representatives

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Chairman Thompson, and Ranking Members Boozman and Scott:

We are writing to express our extreme disappointment that specialty crops were not included in the year-end economic assistance for agriculture negotiated by House and Senate leaders and to propose a path forward to assist specialty crop growers with their increasingly dire economic situation. We hope that you each will be able to support our request.

Shortly after the FARM Act was introduced in the House of Representatives in October, the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance put together a proposed structure for economic aid for our industry. We shared this proposal with the agriculture and appropriations committees in the House and Senate and requested that if Congress were to advance an economic assistance package for agriculture that it be inclusive of specialty crops.

Subsequently, in recognition of the severe and unique challenges confronting specialty crop growers in the United States, the Department of Agriculture announced the new Marketing Assistance for Specialty Crops (MASC) program. This \$2 billion in economic assistance that is being provided through MASC is an important downpayment for our growers, and except for the structure of the payment limits, it is substantially similar to what the Alliance proposed in October. We are grateful to the Department for recognizing this immediate need and for taking this important first step, however, more is required.

The Alliance has been communicating with your staff throughout the year-end negotiations, advocating that Congress include economic assistance for specialty crops in the form of additional funding for MASC along with adjustments to the program's payment limits. It is now clear that this request has been left out of the final package negotiated by Congressional leaders.

Specialty Crops include nutrient-dense fruits, vegetables and tree nuts, which should make up more than half of an American's diet, according to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. It is imperative that specialty crop growers in the United States receive economic aid similar to that which Congress is providing to row crops, which include payment limits twice the level of those announced for specialty crops in MASC. Accordingly, we are requesting that each of you support our request to the Department of Agriculture for an additional \$3 billion in funding from the Commodity Credit Corporation for the MASC program and that it adopt the payment limits used for CFAP-2, including the three-entity multiplier.

Although specialty crop production represents nearly half the farm gate value of American agriculture, specialty crops will receive none of the \$10 billion in economic assistance negotiated by Congressional leaders. Moreover, specialty crops historically receive far less than 10 percent of the Farm Bill's investments. In fact, the Horticulture Title of the 2018 Farm Bill - which includes many of the programs designed exclusively for specialty crops - received about one-half of one percent of the Farm Bill's resources, according to the Congressional Research Service.

The Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance has been advocating for new and innovative long-term investments in the Farm Bill to help our growers compete in an increasingly challenging marketplace. These proposals, which include innovative new programs for research, risk management, technological advancement, and trade, have been receiving widespread bipartisan support from both houses of Congress. Another extension of the 2018 Farm Bill disproportionately affects specialty crop growers by further delaying these investments in an industry that is vital to the health and wellbeing of all Americans.

Our growers need assistance now, and we hope you will robustly support our request to the Department of Agriculture. We look forward to working with Congress to enact a new five-year Farm Bill at the earliest opportunity next year.

Sincerely yours,

Cathy Burns

Co-Chair, Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance
President & CEO, International Fresh
Produce Association

Dave Puglia

Co-Chair, Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance
President & CEO, Western Growers

Mike Joyner

Co-Chair, Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance
President, Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association

Kam Quarles

Co-Chair, Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance
CEO, National Potato Council