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On December 10, the House and Senate filed the conference report to [H.R. 2, the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018](#). H.R. 2, commonly referred to as the 2018 Farm Bill has a number of important provisions that were incorporated in this legislation. Below is a brief summary of the major policy initiatives included in the 2018 Farm Bill that will benefit specialty crop stakeholders across the country. We salute the strong bipartisan approach of the House and Senate Agriculture Committee leadership and look forward to working with them on passage of the legislation this week.

Specialty Crop Block Grants (Section 10107) – The legislation provides \$85 million per year to continue funding the Specialty Crop Block Grant program at 2018 levels. This represents a significant increase in total funding for the program over the five-year lifespan of the Farm Bill from \$375 million to \$425 million. The legislation also works to help ease existing hurdles in current law that have made the funding of multi-state projects more difficult. (Pages 425, 736)

Specialty Crop Research Initiative (Sections 7305, 7614, 12605) – The legislation allows all specialty crops to compete for the full \$80 million per year for specialty crop research. Additionally, the bill provides a \$25 million per year for the creation of a citrus trust fund to help combat citrus greening. Under the previous Farm Bill, the \$25 million set aside for citrus research was taken out of the overall \$80 million budget for specialty crop research. The new provisions are effectively a \$125 million increase over the 2014 level funding over a five-year Farm Bill. (Pages 334, 355, 528, 697)

Mechanization (Sections 7132, 7504, 7610) – The legislation includes language throughout the research title to ensure the prioritization of research into mechanization in various USDA programs. This language was inserted to recognize the growing need for mechanization in labor intensive agricultural commodities. In particular, under AGARDA it prioritizes critical research and development needs for specialty crops; adds under AFRI a research priority that accelerates the use of automation and mechanization for labor-intensive tasks within agriculture; and requires the Secretary to review and assess how USDA programs can be used to support development of mechanization tools for specialty crops. (Pages 314, 340, 349, 690, 669, 705)

Pest and Disease (Permanent Program) – The legislation maintains FY2018 funding at \$75 million per year for pest and disease research and incorporates language to help coordinate research projects to ensure better utilization of existing resources. It also reauthorizes the National Clean Plant Network. This is an increase in overall funding of \$50 million over the life of the 2018 Farm Bill.

Trade Programs (Section 3201) – Creates a new International Market Development Program, which contains several trade promotion programs including the Market Access Program (MAP) and Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops (TASC). While bringing together existing programs like MAP and TASC, the revised structure will continue to ensure that both programs continue receiving funding at existing levels of no less than \$200 million and \$9 million per year respectively. It also eliminates statutory impediments and encourages regulatory enhancements to make TASC more accessible and valuable. (Pages 122, 613)

Federal Nutrition Programs (Sections 4008, 4202, 4205, 4207) – Under the nutrition title, USDA is directed to issue formal guidance to states on the waiver process for retailers that wish to incentivize purchases for SNAP consumers. Allowable foods include fruits, vegetables, dairy, and whole grains. In addition, the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP), (which provides fresh fruit and vegetable snacks to low-income elementary students, continues to be funded. No programmatic changes were made so the program will continue with fresh only offerings. The Food Insecurity and Nutrition Incentive (FINI) program is funded at \$250 million, an increase from \$135 million in the 2014 Farm Bill. This funding establishes the program permanently, targets retailers that are open year-round with more convenient hours of operation, and prioritizes projects that allow for incentives to be redeemed fruits and vegetables only. The program also carves out funding for health care providers, allowing for fresh fruits and vegetables to be “prescribed” to low-income patients through the form of a voucher to be redeemed at a participating vendor. Finally, the bill directs USDA to fully enforce existing Buy American provisions and clarifies that USDA should be ensuring that state agencies and school districts have a thorough understanding of compliance. USDA must issue a report to Congress within 180 days outlining their plan and progress. (Pages 153, 170, 171, 182, 632, 643, 645, 647)

National Organic Program (Sections 10104) – The legislation makes a number of changes to the operation of the National Organic Program to both protect the domestic organic market and ensure that foreign competitors are in compliance with U. S. organic food production regulations. Additionally, the legislation changes the representation on the National Organic Standards Board to allow for employees of an operation, not just the owner the operation, to be Board members. Finally, the legislation clarifies that amendments to the national list require a two-thirds vote of the NOSB. (Pages 421, 733)

New Program for Urban Agriculture (Sections 7212) – Under Section VII of the legislation, USDA will establish a new office to assist urban farmers and indoor growers to help them access federal assistance, gain insight into best practices and ensure their eligibility for risk management tools typically set aside for traditional growers. The program also established \$10 million in mandatory funds for this program. (Pages 330, 769)

New Risk Management Tools for Specialty Crops (Section 11105) – The legislation requires the head of the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation to consider the development of at least one new risk management tool for specialty crop producers each year. It also establishes a Specialty Crop Coordinator and Specialty Crop Liaison in each regional office. It also includes

research and development for products including tropical storm and hurricane protection for specialty crops, citrus, and greenhouse operations. (Pages 441, 745)