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POSITION PAPER 2008 Farm Bill

America's national agricultural policy, the Farm Bill, is currently set to expire on March 15 of this year. Both the House and the Senate have passed versions of a new farm program, and we are pleased that both pending bills recognize for the first time the importance of specialty crops (fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, nursery crops and floriculture). With a farm gate value of approximately \$55 billion, specialty crops represent more than half of all agricultural production.

We urge Congressional leaders to work to reach an agreement between the House and Senate passed bills, and we respectfully ask the Administration to be a part of the process of developing a new farm policy that will recognize the importance of specialty crops. A long-term extension of the current Farm Bill is not an option. It would further delay addressing the needs of the industry until the new bill is passed.

Farm policy should benefit a broad range of American farmers. The U.S. grape and wine community strongly supports an equitable Farm Bill that will elevate the government's financial investment in the competitiveness of specialty crop producers.

Specialty crop producers are working hard to fulfill consumer needs for high-quality, affordable and healthy food and farm products. Government policy should focus on tools that will enhance quality and marketability; foster innovation and the adoption of best practices; increase production and processing efficiencies; and, promote agricultural sustainability that adds value to the economy, environment and quality of life in rural communities.

The pending bills have a number of provisions that will help producers of specialty crops. These include, but are not limited to:

- Mandatory funding of up to \$365 million over five years for specialty crop competitiveness grants to state agriculture departments to support production-related research, commodity promotion, nutrition, food safety and inspection, and other competitiveness-enhancing programs.
- Establish a Specialty Crop Research Initiative to develop and disseminate science-based tools to address the needs of specific crops and their regions. The program would award competitive grants and include mandatory funding of \$215 million over five years.
- Establish a National Clean Plant Network (NCPN) with \$20 million over five years (mandatory funds) to develop a source for clean planting stock programs for key horticultural crops. The funding would establish centers that have the expertise, facilities, and climate necessary to efficiently produce, maintain, and distribute healthy planting stock for fruit trees, nut trees, and grapevines.

- Increase limits for the Tree Assistance Program (TAP) to \$150,000 per year. This program provides financial relief to owners of eligible productive trees, bushes and vines damaged by natural disasters.
- Expand and improve the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Innovation Grants with funding at \$250 million over five years. There also would be \$5 million a year for outreach to specialty crop producers. Conservation programs should be expanded to reward good stewardship practices and recognize the ecosystem services provided by farms and ranches.
- Continue to invest up to \$240 million a year for the Market Access Program. This partnership has proven successful in helping expand exports of high value agricultural products
- Continue the Value Added Grant Program and increase funding to \$150 million over five years.
- Encourage the Department of Agriculture to support the use of sustainable practices by producers and processors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the great importance of this issue, WineAmerica and the Winegrape Growers of America urge members of Congress and the Administration to assure the needs of specialty crops are addressed in the pending Farm Bill and to work together to pass such legislation this year. We oppose any extension of the present farm programs which do not recognize the contributions of specialty crop producers.

WineAmerica is the national trade association of American wine producers with more than 800 wineries in 48 states. Questions should be directed to Bill Nelson, President of WineAmerica, at (202) 783-2756 Extension 123.

Winegrape Growers of America is a federation of state winegrape grower organizations representing America's production of grapes for wine. For more information contact Fowler West at The Washington Group, (202) 789-2111.