

Farm Foundation Conference

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Research Needs of Specialty Crop
Producers

Background

- Specialty crop industry
 - Fruits, tree nuts, vegetables, and nursery crops, including floriculture.
 - Major contributor to the U.S. agricultural economy. 10 million harvested cropland acres in 2004.
 - Value of total U.S. specialty crops (\$49 billion in sales)
 - Five major program crops (\$45.8 billion in sales).

Challenges

- Increasing competition from lower cost foreign producers
- Declining availability of labor, land, water and energy resources
- Persistent and serious pressure from insect and plant diseases
- Increasing costs and greater management complexity from state and federal regulations
- Greater demand for improved microbiological food safety

Characteristics of S.C. Research

- Crops are diverse, with complex, site-specific growth characteristics
- Many are perennial, require considerable capital expense to establish, and do not produce a crop until several years after planting.
- Producers and processors must meet exacting and highly differentiated quality requirements for their products
- Often requires whole plant research in commercially relevant cropping systems

Needs

- Enhanced research, extension, and education programs are needed to help the specialty crop industry address these challenges.
- The Administration proposes investing \$100 million in annual mandatory spending to create a new Specialty Crop Research Initiative to address the critical needs of the specialty crop industry. The initiative will support both intramural and extramural programs across the nation and provide science-based tools to address needs of **specific crops** and **regions**

Example: Engineering Solutions for Specialty Crop Challenges

- To serve many Specialty Crops – tree fruits, grapes, nuts, cane fruits
- Labor productivity
- Production efficiency
- Convey industry needs to engineering R & D community
- Investigate current R&D activities and technologies applicable to specialty crops
- USDA (ARS & CSREES) & NSF workshop – April 2007

Industry Cooperation

- Almond Board
- American Vineyard Foundation
- California Tree Fruit Agreement
- Citrus Research Board
- National Berry Crop Initiative
- National Grape and Wine Initiative
- National Tree Fruit Technology Roadmap