



The National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA)

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President: Bill Northey – Secretary, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship

October 27, 2011

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition & Forestry
238A Senate Russell Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Frank Lucas
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition & Forestry
238A Senate Russell Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
1305 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairs and Ranking Members:

As the chief agriculture officials in their states, members of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) are keenly aware of the changing dynamics and increasing challenges in food, fiber and fuel production across the country and have a deep appreciation for the important contribution agriculture makes to our nation's economy.

NASDA members are responsible for a wide range of programs including food safety, combating the introduction and spread of plant and animal diseases, environmental protection, and fostering the economic vitality of our rural communities. From this unique vantage point, NASDA's 2012 Farm Bill recommendations seek to ensure agricultural producers across the nation have the tools they need to access markets, conserve the environment, and produce a safe and affordable supply of food, fuel and fiber. As your committees craft our nation's agriculture policy, we encourage you to:

Maintain a Robust and Flexible Specialty Crop Block Grants Program

The Specialty Crop Block Grant (SCBG) Program provides important financial resources to our nation's specialty crop industries. To remain effective, program funding must be maintained and the program must retain the flexibility afforded in its current structure. The SCBG program is an outstanding success story on how government and industry can collaborate to improve our agriculture competitiveness while also providing essential health benefits to our citizens. The program provides \$55 million each year that allows State Departments of Agriculture the ability to address critical needs expressed by their diverse specialty crop stakeholders in a timely and relevant manner.

Fully Fund & Enhance Coordination of Invasive Species Programs

To address the increasing threat invasive species pose to agricultural producers nationwide, bold action is required. Building on the successes of the invasive species programs created by

the 2008 Farm Bill, Congress should bring additional tools to bear on this serious economic threat and create a stand-alone Invasive Species title. Sections 10201 and 10202 of the 2008 Farm Bill should be retained and fully funded, while providing additional tools for domestic invasive species issues. Enhanced coordination of other invasive species funding through APHIS, the Forest Service, and NRCS, as well as programs operated by the Department of Interior, should be considered to strengthen programs and maximize the value of the federal funding.

Invest in Locally-Driven, Flexible & Efficient Conservation Programs

The next Farm Bill must make substantial investments in locally-driven, flexible, and efficient conservation programs that provide producers the financial and technical assistance they need to conserve our nation's natural resources and meet increasing regulatory demands. The next Farm Bill must also make additional efforts to address water quality challenges and growing federal regulatory pressures, as well as ensuring adequate funding for technical assistance and programs such as the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) that document the progress of these conservation programs.

Support the Market Access Program & Other Trade Development Programs

The 2012 Farm Bill must provide continued funding for the Market Access Program (MAP) and other foreign market development programs at current levels. These programs, including MAP, the Foreign Market Development Program (FMD), Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops Program (TASC) and the Emerging Markets Program (EMP), were established in the Farm Bill to promote American-grown and produced commodities that are in competition with heavily subsidized foreign products.

This modest investment to help small US businesses gain access to foreign markets has a big economic impact. Between 2002 and 2009 these programs increased the average annual level of U.S. farm cash receipts by \$4.4 billion and net cash farm income by \$1.5 billion (USDA). Approximately 8,400 American jobs are supported by every billion dollars in U.S. agricultural exports (USDA).

Other Recommendations for State-Federal Cooperative Programs

From invasive species programs to federal disaster assistance, state departments of agriculture have increasingly been called upon to deliver important federal programs. State departments of agriculture are well positioned to quickly and efficiently respond to complex problems and have unparalleled ties to agricultural producers in all 50 states. We welcome the opportunity to build upon these important relationships with our federal partners, though to the extent states are called upon to help administer federal programs, adequate funding for administrative expenses must be provided.

In addition, we look forward to working with you to ensure a workable program for the interstate shipment of state-inspected meat products.

By maintaining a robust and flexible Specialty Crop Block Grants Program, enhancing invasive species program coordination and funding, investing in flexible and efficient conservation

programs, and supporting market development programs, federal agriculture policy can help provide producers with the tools they need to access markets, conserve the environment, and produce a safe and affordable supply of food, fuel and fiber.

As you and other members of Congress shape the direction of federal agriculture policy—whether through the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction or through regular order—we stand ready to assist you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Northey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "B" and a long, sweeping underline.

NASDA President

Secretary, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship