



June 26, 2003

The Honorable Robert Bennett
Chair
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
Dirksen Senate Office Building, Room SD-136
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Herbert H. Kohl
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural
Development and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
Hart Senate Office Building, Room SH-123
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators:

NASDA expresses its strong support for funding a Specialty Crops Block Grant Program in the FY 2004 Agricultural Appropriations Bill. A similar appropriation that was received by state agencies two years ago has been a resounding success.

As you may recall, the Specialty Crops Block Grant Program was part of the emergency farm assistance package approved by Congress and signed into law by President Bush in August 2001. The program provided approximately \$159 million for specialty crop production assistance and funds were distributed through state grants. Each state received a base grant of \$500,000, with Puerto Rico receiving \$1 million, to "support activities that promote agriculture" and the remaining funds were allocated to states based on the ratio of the value of vegetable, fruit and nut production in each state to the national total. Total cash receipts for vegetable, fruit and nut production in 1999 was more than \$28 billion. Clearly, specialty crops are a critical component of agricultural production in all regions of the country.

States, working in cooperation with their agricultural community, were able to direct funding to areas that would provide the greatest overall benefits to their state citizens and producers. These areas included programs such as food safety and security, agricultural education, research, pest and disease prevention, marketing and promotion, and enhancement of the health and nutrition of our children and adults.

Specialty crop block grants would continue to bolster the development and enhance the global competitiveness of these crops and to meet the varied needs of specialty crop producers that are not usually served through traditional farm programs.

Congress recognized the benefits of specialty crops to this country's agricultural production by funding such a program and we greatly appreciate the action take two years. We respectfully urge Congress to once again fund a Specialty Crops Block Grant Program with funds directed to the state entity responsible for agricultural production and regulation.

Sincerely,

Patrick A. Takasugi
Secretary, Idaho Department of Agriculture
NASDA President

William (Bill) J. Lyons, Jr.
Secretary, California Department
of Food and Agriculture
Chair, NASDA Specialty Crop Task Force

