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NASDA CALLS FOR FUNDING OF SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM *State Departments of Agriculture Issue New Report*

Washington, D.C. – NASDA President Gene Hugoson called on Congress this week to fund a Specialty Crop Block Grant Program. Hugoson provided written testimony to the Senate Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development and Related Agencies of the Committee on Appropriations requesting that a block grant program be funded in fiscal year 2005.

Congress first approved a \$159.4 million specialty crop block grant program in 2001 and chose states to administer the block grant. The program was directed at the specialty crop industry to address difficult circumstances caused by disease, low prices, and lack of funding in several areas including research, promotion and inspection.

“As directors, secretaries and commissioners of agriculture, we are on the front lines in delivering many of the services critical to the success of specialty crop growers,” Hugoson said. “We believe that this block grant program has improved the specialty crop industry’s ability to sustain, expand and enhance their production systems.” Hugoson is the Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Agriculture.

NASDA believes this program is a public investment in critical infrastructure that will benefit not only the economy but public health and the environment. It made significant contributions towards fighting obesity. More than \$10 million was invested in nutrition programs like 5-A-Day, In-School Nutrition Promotions and Farmers’ Market Nutrition Programs.

“The block grant program was a major step in recognizing the importance of investing in the competitiveness and future of specialty crop agriculture,” California Agriculture Secretary A.G. Kawamura said. Kawamura is the chair of NASDA’s Specialty Crop Task Force.

“The contribution of the specialty crop industry to the economic health of the United States and to our agricultural economy is clear when you consider that cash receipts generated by specialty crops in 2002 was \$57.7 billion,” said Florida Agriculture Commissioner Charles Bronson. Bronson is the chair of NASDA’s Marketing and International Trade Committee. “Investment in specialty crops can be used to support on-going research that is furthering the development of new varieties of specialty crops and contributing to advances in fighting foreign pests and diseases,” Bronson said.

There are concerns about the explosive growth in importation of specialty crops into the United States versus the relatively flat growth in exportation of our products to other countries. Since 1997, imports increased 39 percent while exports only increased 6.5 percent.



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NASDA is a nonprofit association of public officials comprised of the Commissioners, Secretaries, and Directors of agriculture in the fifty states and four territories

NASDA surveyed the states regarding the block grant program and compiled a progress report. The report highlights some of the many projects that have benefited the specialty crop industry and provides a look into how states set priorities in each of their states. By directing states to deliver the grant funds, it allowed each state to tailor the aid to fit its unique circumstances. States and individual grant recipients were also able to match grant funds by more than \$45 million. The report can be found on NASDA's web site at <http://www.nasda.org/specialtycrop/>.

Legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives, H.R. 3242, the Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2003, authorizes \$470 million for a specialty crop block grant program. The bill also provides for programs concerning marketing, research, international trade, pest and disease exclusion and conservation. NASDA fully endorses H.R. 3242 and asks that Congress approve the legislation.