



News Release

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New York Potato Grower Calls on Congress to Build on Farm Bill Investments in Specialty Crops

Grower testifies at U.S. House Agriculture Committee's Farm Bill field hearing

Washington, D.C. – At one of only four farm bill field hearings scheduled by the U.S. House Agriculture Committee, New York potato grower Ralph Child urged Congress to build on previous investments in the specialty crop industry.

Child noted that although specialty crops make up nearly 50 percent of all U.S. farm gate value for plant agriculture, national farm policies prior to the 2008 Farm Bill did not address the priorities of the industry. For the first time, the 2008 Farm Bill created federal programs “designed to maintain and improve competitiveness and not to provide compensation to growers nor distort the specialty crop marketplace,” said Child.

Owner of Childstock Farms in Malone, NY, Child grows 300 acres each of seed potatoes and leafy greens. He is a member and past president of the Empire State Potato Growers and current member of the National Potato Council's Board of Directors.

Child stressed the importance of federal research to the industry's ability to meet production goals, and called on Congress to refine and enhance funding for two important programs created in the 2008 Farm Bill. “The Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) provides competitive funding for multidisciplinary, multistate research projects that address critical industry needs. These are big projects with big promise to solve big problems. Since specialty crop production is so regionally diverse, Congress also wisely included the Specialty Crop Block Grant (SCBG) program in the 2008 Farm Bill to address local needs. This program as administered by the state departments of agriculture is meeting the priorities of smaller growers like me whose needs for research and technical assistance might otherwise be overlooked,” said Child.

He also stressed the importance of U.S. Department of Agriculture funding for the Golden Nematode Program in New York, which maintains the quarantine on the potentially devastating pest.

With international trade gaining more importance to the industry, Child urged Congress to build on the successes of the Market Access Program (MAP) and Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops (TASC), which help U.S. potato growers gain international market access and compete with foreign growers.

Finally, Child called for Congress to work together to help meet the workforce needs of the agriculture sector, urging members to “approve a comprehensive immigration policy that provides an opportunity for existing agriculture workers to earn a legal status, creates a viable guest worker program and secures our nation’s borders.”

Child’s full testimony can be found here:

<http://agriculture.house.gov/hearings/hearingDetails.aspx?NewsID=1539>

Prior to the 2008 Farm Bill debate, the industry came together to create the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance (SCFBA), which is co-chaired by the National Potato Council. Today, the coalition is comprised of more than 120 specialty crop associations, companies, and cooperatives across the United States, which work to promote market-based farm policy.

The National Potato Council is the advocate for the economic well-being of U.S. potato growers on federal legislative, regulatory, environmental, and trade issues. Potato growers, along with the U.S. potato industry as a whole, directly benefit from involvement in the National Potato Council. NPC supports the U.S. potato industry by monitoring issues affecting the strength and viability of the potato industry, influencing regulators and legislators on issues crucial to the industry's long term success, ensuring fair market access for potatoes and potato products, and bringing the unique issues and interests of diverse growing regions in the U.S. together on a national level. The National Potato Council is a voluntary organization supported by quota assessments from state organizations, allied industry memberships and sponsorships, and directly by potato growers through membership dues.

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