



## Senate Approves Bill to Market Specialty Crops December 8, 2004

**Washington, DC** – The Senate last night approved the Specialty Crop Competitiveness Act, legislation to boost the marketing of highly nutritious fruits, vegetables and other specialty crops to American consumers and international markets.

The bill was sponsored by Representatives Doug Ose (R-Calif.) and Cal Dooley (D-Calif.) in the House, where it was passed on October 7. It was championed by Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) in the Senate and now goes to the President for his signature.

**“California’s agricultural industry is of vital importance both to the health of the State’s economy and that of the nation,”** Senator Feinstein said. **“However, globalization is making it more difficult for California’s specialty crops to compete both in the United States and abroad. I applaud Representatives Ose and Dooley for crafting legislation that takes a long-term approach to increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables, improving access to foreign markets for U.S. specialty crops, and creating a safer and more secure domestic food supply.”**

Specialty crops are defined as fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, and nursery crops. These agricultural products, produced in all 50 states, constitute at least half of U.S. gross agriculture receipts, contribute nearly \$60 billion to the U.S. economy, and provide 60 percent of America's daily nutritional requirements.

Specifically, the legislation:

- Authorizes \$44.5 million for block grants to state departments of agriculture to promote the marketing of specialty crop products.
- Invests \$5 million annually in research into methyl bromide alternatives.
- Authorizes \$2 million yearly to carry out the Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops program.
- Establishes an annual \$1 million pest and disease response fund account within the U.S. Treasury.

The funding is authorized through Fiscal Year 2009. The legislation also promotes specialty crop clean air benefits, produce quality improvement, new crop protection tools and integrated pest management, efforts to control foreign and invasive pests and diseases, and national specialty crop development initiative grants.

The measures included in the bill are designed to make American specialty crops more competitive in a global marketplace. Foreign specialty crop producers generally have lower water and

labor costs, face less stringent restrictions and regulations, and receive considerably larger subsidies than American farmers. Unlike the nation's major grain producers, U.S. specialty crop growers have received very little federal financial support.

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