

Good morning Chairman Chambliss and Members of the Committee. My name is Bill Brim. I am a vegetable grower from Tift County, Georgia. Lewis Taylor farms is a diversified transplant and vegetable production farm operation. We have 352,000 square feet of greenhouse production space and 4000 acres of vegetable production. Our greenhouse operation produces over 85 million vegetable transplants a year and over 15 million pine seedlings. I am here today representing over 200 producer members of the Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association.

The fruit and vegetable industry is growing at a rapid pace in the State of Georgia. We are adding jobs and dollars to rural economies throughout the State. But this growth is not limited to our State. Specialty crop growers produce approximately 50% of the farm gate value of total plant agricultural production in the United States.

Despite the impact to the U.S. economy, specialty crop growers receive a very small percentage of federal resources aimed at promoting and sustaining efficient agricultural production. We hope the Committee will take a hard look at a balanced farm bill that includes an increased emphasis on specialty crop producers.

This morning I would like to focus my remarks on several key areas of the farm bill that we hope the Committee will consider during your deliberations in the coming months. Fruit and Vegetable grower organizations have been meeting to discuss common interests for the farm bill and we hope to share with you the fruits of those meetings soon.

I am not here today to tell you we want a new farm program for vegetables. Although we do believe there are areas of the farm bill that should address issues of concern to our industry.

Of specific interest to our producers are issues related to:

- * Restrictions of Planting Flexibility
- * Unique Attributes of Specialty Crop Producers
- * State Block Grants
- * Research
- * Nutrition Programs
- * Crop Insurance

Restrictions of Planting Flexibility

We support this long-standing provision as a fundamental matter of equity among farmers. As long as some farmers receive direct payments from the government, they should not be allowed to plant crops on that subsidized land that compete with unsubsidized farmers.

Unique Attributes of Specialty Crop Producers

Due to the nature of high-value specialty crop production, many current Farm Bill programs and disaster programs are of limited benefit to specialty producers due to payment caps, limits on Adjusted Gross Income, limits on off-farm income even if integral to farming operations, etc. We support a thorough review of all farm programs to ensure that specialty crop producers have access to benefits comparable to other farmers, rather than being excluded or limited simply due to a higher-cost of production.

State Block Grants

We support an expansion of the State Block Grants for Specialty Crops program originally authorized in the Specialty Crop Competitiveness Act of 2004, and funded through appropriations in the FY06 Agricultural Appropriations bill. Due to the wide diversity and localized needs in specialty crop production, state departments of agriculture are uniquely able to assist local growers with the specific investments they need to increase competitiveness.

Georgia producers believe this is the most important component to be considered in the 2007 Farm Bill debate. Fruit and Vegetable producers have operated successfully without farm programs. But marketing and agricultural research are critical to our success. Declining industry dollars due to labor and energy costs and other issues inhibit meeting our research and marketing needs for the future. Competing interests for federal research dollars and the pressures on research monies for state land grant universities diminish our opportunities to compete in the domestic and world marketplaces. State block grants provide an additional resource to make our industry more competitive.

Research

Agricultural research serves as both a foundation and a catalyst for growth in the advancement of our industry. However, federal investment in agricultural research dedicated to the economic vitality and long-term viability of United States specialty crops has been extremely limited. Specialty crops and their research needs are unique and important. Our crops are characterized by high production input costs, unique market challenges, and our crops provide a significant source of essential nutrients required for good health.

With the dramatic reductions in Cooperative Extension staff and research personnel, support for applied specialty crop research has been significantly curtailed. Fruit and vegetable growers need assistance and support from U.S.D.A. researchers to find practical production solutions.

Federal investments in research for specialty crop production, processing, marketing, and consumption must be re-emphasized in the next farm bill. We believe research investments in special crop agriculture should be allocated to reflect the national importance of these products to the American diet. Over 50% of the Food Pyramid and nutritional guidelines is provided by fruit and vegetables, we believe research funding in U.S.D.A. should be increased to reflect the

importance of these products.

Nutrition Programs

We support a strong new focus within the 2007 Farm Bill on increasing the access and availability of fruits and vegetables, particularly to children. We support expansion of the school fruit and vegetable snack program, increased commodity purchases, higher allocation to the Department of Defense (DOD) Fresh program for schools, development of a new nutrition promotion program to assist producers in enhancing their markets, and a general requirements that USDA feeding programs and commodity purchasing comply with the 2005 Dietary Guidelines.

Crop Insurance

Most fruits and vegetables are not covered by a 'crop insurance' program. GFVGA would like to see an increase in pilot projects and studies to determine the feasibility of minor crop coverage.

The pecan industry has specific provisions that should be addressed in new crop insurance policy. Crops such as peaches, peanuts, cotton, corn and corn have a provision that in the event of a crop failure, insurance coverage cannot be adjusted down more than 10% of the individual farms APH (yield average) which is referred to by the Risk Management Agency as a 10% cup. Without the 10% cup, weather patterns could render these policies worthless in coming years.

The RMA has a restriction that penalizes the grower from thinning his trees more than 12.5%. This reduction coverage lasts for a period of two years. This is completely contrary to all recommendations by the Extension Service and the USDA for good cultural practices. Pecan growers have provided appropriate data in the Southeast by pecan specialists but USDA refuses to accept this data.

There are no provisions in the pecan insurance program to cover the loss of trees. Pecan producers believe that a simple rider could be attached to our present policy that would provide coverage for tree loss in the event of a disaster. This could be offered to the grower as an option with an increase in the premium, for example a 5% increase.

I want to thank the Committee for giving our organization an opportunity to testify today. We sincerely hope the next farm bill will address issues of concern to specialty crop producers and reflect the value of their production to the U.S. Economy, as well as the dietary needs of all Americans.

My farm is located just east of here. Chairman Chambliss, I want to tell you how much I appreciate and the farmers of this state appreciate your interest in Georgia Agriculture. I know first hand your efforts in the recent immigration debate and your interest in balancing our

security interests with that of the agricultural needs of Georgia. We are grateful for all you do.

Thank you.