

Statement of A.G. Kawamura
Secretary, California Department of Food and Agriculture
United States Senate
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

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Thank you Chairman Harkin, members of the committee, for calling this series of hearings to discuss challenges and opportunities facing American growers and ranchers. I am A.G. Kawamura, Secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture. I am here today as Governor Schwarzenegger's representative. In California, we are working hard to share our understanding that access to nutritious California grown foods is an essential component of a healthy lifestyle and is key to maintaining the economic prosperity of the state and nation. The health of this nation relies upon the investment we make in our agricultural economy.

As we move toward reauthorizing the U.S. farm bill we must understand the key challenges and opportunities facing agriculture. It was not long ago that this nation's specialty crop industry (fruits, vegetables, and nuts) were referred to as minor crops. In fact, the U.S. specialty crops industry now accounts for nearly 50 percent of U.S. farm gate value. It is not wrong to say that U.S. agriculture has been defined in the past by the great success of corn, dairy, wheat, rice and cotton. But it is wrong to omit specialty crops from that list.

Every nation in the world seeks a healthy, thriving population. We as the United States, the producer of the safest and highest quality agricultural products, are facing a crisis in nutrition. The tragedy of adult onset diabetes in children and other health implications are the evidence of this crisis. According to health professionals, we as nation spend a 95 percent of our health care cost after we are already sick, and less than 5 percent on prevention and wellness. U.S. agriculture provides a healthy diet of dairy, grains and specialty crops. We provide guidelines that can improve the individual diet, increase the health of the nation and reduce the cost and burden of health care. Yet, when we speak of a farm bill, consumers and the media see entitlements. Instead, we should speak of a "public health bill" that places agriculture on the forefront of preventive care - providing healthy and nutritious products to a thriving population.

The key elements of this public health bill should focus on the overall health of our nation. The areas of nutrition, rural communities, working landscapes as part of the environment, specialty crops and renewable energy must be priorities. The specialty crop industry, nearly 50 percent of U.S. farm gate value, is a key to improving the health of this nation. Within a farm bill context we should not see specialty crops as an individual title but rather encompassed within all title areas of the farm bill.

The Specialty Crop Competitiveness Act of 2001 was unable to fulfill the demand that was placed upon it. The act did however provide multiple successes in the areas of research, nutrition, disease prevention, marketing and trade - hitting the target areas of a healthy nation. The most innovative concept in this act provided funding directly to states to address local challenges and opportunities that cannot be effectively addressed by the national government. Every state's specialty crop needs are different, and states are in the best position to assist local growers with the specific investments they need to increase competitiveness. The Specialty

Crops Competitiveness Act is an investment in the health of the nation and must be integrated within our public health bill.

We can all agree that investment in agriculture is necessary. Providing the funding for that investment is difficult. We should not be restricted to a shrinking pie scenario, when we are making an investment in our critical resource base for the next five years. In respect to funding for the farm bill, Congress should look for innovative areas in government funding that can increase the preventive role of agricultural in our nation's health care by reprioritizing our investment strategy.

In the end, we, as stewards of our nation's agricultural infrastructure, must make a targeted investment that enhances the health of our population and environment and continues to provide a dependable, safe and affordable food supply. If we fail to make that investment, we will be held accountable for turning over the security and safety of our food supply to foreign agricultural suppliers. A secure domestic food, fuel and fiber supply is a national security imperative for the United States.

In closing, we have seen the success of the Specialty Crop Competitiveness Act of 2001, the current success of the 2004 Specialty Crop Act, and now we look to Congress to extend the principles and increase the commitment of specialty crop funding within the farm bill. I cannot stress enough that this is not the time in our nation's history to allow a shrinking pie mentality for the investment we need to make in this strategic resource. Our commitment to agriculture and our commitment to a healthy population deserve this investment.

Chairman Harkin, members of the committee, thank you again for this opportunity to provide remarks.