

Comments on 2007 Farm Bill
Submitted by Roger Mix of Center, CO
on Behalf of the Colorado Potato Administrative Committee
To the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
Field Hearing
Brighton, Colorado

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to express my views on the 2007 Farm Bill this afternoon.

My name is Roger Mix. I am a third generation farmer from Center, Colorado in the San Luis Valley of south central Colorado. My family farm produces certified seed potatoes and malting barley. I represent Colorado as a director on the executive committee of the National Potato Council and also as a board member of the United States Potato Board.

It is a privilege to be here today and I must admit I am excited at the opportunity I have to speak to the need for a specialty crop title in the new Farm Bill. It is a fact that fruit, vegetable, and tree nut production accounts for over \$34 billion in farm gate value annually, or 30% of all farm cash receipts on an annual basis. The specialty crop industry is an important sector of United States agriculture deserving of full and equal consideration as the other agricultural sectors in the Farm Bill.

Speaking for potato growers we are not interested in direct program payments. The type of funding we want to see in the Farm Bill is designed to build our long term competitiveness and insure sustainability for our industry. Targeted investments in our industry will help us compete with international competitors who do not face the same regulatory restrictions U.S. producers face. Resources and policies to help open potential export markets by removing trade barriers are critical for the growth of the specialty crop industry.

There are several key priorities I would like to see in the next Farm Bill:

?³ Nutrition programs- Expansion of fruits and vegetables accessibility to school children through increased purchases for schools. Continued nutritional education and efforts to comply with the increased consumption of fruits and vegetables required by the new 2005 Dietary Guidelines. Increased consumption of fruits and vegetables addresses the growing obesity problem and health care cost issues our entire country is facing.

?³ Research- We need significant increases in the amount of investment in specialty crop research. Research in potato breeding and potato nutrition are extremely important to the future of my farm and the potato industry in Colorado. New research investment has not been funded at sustainable levels for specialty crops.

?³ State Block Grants- We need to expand this program because state departments of agriculture are in tune with the diverse needs of their growers to know what specific investment will increase specialty crop competitiveness. For example, in Washington 75% of the potatoes produced go into some type of processing market whereas 98% of the Colorado crop is sold on

the fresh market. Different types of investments are needed.

?³ International Trade- Programs are needed to increase access to foreign markets through addressing the trade barriers we face involving Sanitary and Phytosanitary issues. Of particular interest to Colorado is the continued expansion of the Mexican market which has already been agreed to but never been allowed. More support for the Market Access Program is needed to assist specialty crops in the increasingly competitive world market of today

?³ Conservation- We support additional investment and support for conservation programs, in particular an expansion of the EQIP program that would allow more specialty crop producers to participate. A critical issue for Colorado and the arid western United States is the sustainable use of ground and surface water for irrigation. This needs to be addressed as a national priority. Increased funding for the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is necessary to assist watersheds like the San Luis Valley in the process of achieving a sustainable environment for irrigation. The economic impact of declining irrigation supplies is crucial for the survival of rural communities whose existence depends on the health of the local farm economy.

These are the priorities that potato growers and the specialty crop coalition are promoting to enhance our ability to improve our industry and position us to survive and thrive in the future. One additional item of great importance to specialty crop producers is the need for continued restrictions on planting flexibility that prevents fruits and vegetables from being planted on program crop acreage. To allow subsidized farmers and land to compete with unsubsidized farmers would be an inequitable and market distorting practice. Potatoes in particular are extremely price sensitive to supply and demand. The additional acreage this would create could potentially destroy the profitability of potato production.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am thrilled that specialty crops are being asked to the table in these discussions that are so crucial in determining the future of agriculture in our great country. I hope my comments today will assist you in your role in shaping this future so agriculture and our country will prosper in the years ahead. As a third generation family farmer I am counting on it.