

Statement of Jim Nugent
Fruit grower and Chair, Michigan Tree Fruit Commission
Suttons Bay, Michigan
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Michigan agriculture has the distinction of being the second most diverse in the nation. Our state is blessed with a wide range of soils and topography and surrounded by the Great Lakes. This creates the natural diversity that allows for the production of many different crops, including a wide variety of fruits and vegetables.

My wife and I farm on the Leelanau Peninsula in northwest lower Michigan, an area that is exceptionally well-suited for the production of cherries and other fruit crops. Growing food has its challenges to remain globally competitive and sustainable. Hence, agriculture relies extensively on land grant universities for the research and information to keep our industries viable. I strongly support increased federal funding for research and Extension.

Let me give you an example of why research is so critical to Michigan agriculture. In 2008, an insect called the spotted winged drosophila, or SWD, made its way from Asia to California. It lays its eggs in thin skinned fruits resulting in larvae developing in the fruit. In 2010, a Michigan State University (MSU) Extension educator found evidence of this pest in Michigan. Since then the population has exploded and now it seriously threatens both the cherry and blueberry industries.

As growers, we turn to MSU researchers and Extension for answers on how to manage SWD. Federal research funding is critical to address this type of serious threat. The Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) funding is essential to address major issues like SWD that affect crops throughout the country. I am also very pleased that MSU has applied for SWD matching research funds from the new Rapid Outcomes from Agriculture Research program which is part of the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research. The Foundation was created in the 2014 Farm Bill to increase the investment in agricultural research through innovative public-private partnerships. The newly created Rapid Outcomes program, modeled after Project GREEN at MSU, has the potential to greatly help industries address new and emerging issues in agriculture by obligating funding for research in an expedited time frame.

In Michigan, MSU has four research centers strategically placed in major fruit-growing areas. This field research is imperative to complement the research conducted in labs, greenhouses and growth chambers on campus. Both apple and cherry growers have established programs that for many years have provided grower funding for research, but falling federal and state

funding was straining the ability of the infrastructure at MSU to meet the needs. As a result, the tree fruit industries worked together to establish the Michigan Tree Fruit Commission.

The Michigan Tree Fruit Commission is a grower funded state research program that was created to make sure that MSU has adequate facilities and the people necessary in research and Extension to help growers solve the critical problems that challenge our ability to produce food. The program has already proven to be successful, but will only work if we maintain a partnership with MSU. For MSU to be that strong partner requires adequate federal funding that helps support the scientists and facilities needed to address the issues and to fund research beyond the scope of our industry's ability to fund.

I also wish to express my support for the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) within the conservation title of the Farm Bill. Production of tree fruits and wine grapes in Michigan is found on the rolling hills close to the shores of Lake Michigan. It has the right combination of soils and micro-climate to produce the healthy and tasty fruit that consumers crave. This area's beautiful views also make it desirable for residential development. The Farm Bill's conservation title has been crucial to protecting the farmland in Leelanau County so it can remain viable for food production.

As a member of the Board of the Leelanau Conservancy, I have seen firsthand how the Conservancy has worked with farmers and with the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service to protect nearly 3,300 acres of prime and unique farmland with conservation easements since 2001. This work is made possible through ACEP. In order to expand farmland protection efforts, in 2016, the Leelanau Conservancy was one of the recipients of a RCPP award titled "Tribal Streams and Michigan Fruit Belt Collaborative." This award has created an excellent new partnership that also includes the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy and Conservation Resource Alliance. The program will allow the Leelanau and Grand Traverse conservancies to permanently protect land with conservation easements that are valuable both for agriculture and water resource protection, while partners implement other practices to protect the area's water resources, improving critical fish habitat.

I strongly encourage your continued support of these and other conservation programs within the Farm Bill. Sustaining a viable agricultural economy that can produce healthy food to feed our country and the world requires an investment in resource protection. As a grower, I am willing and committed to doing what I can to protect and conserve the land and water resources for future generations while producing healthy food. However, we know that much more conservation is implemented when USDA is a strong partner in the effort. This assistance is particularly critical for the small to medium size family farms that dominate our industry and are so important to the fabric and economy of our rural communities.

