



2008 Farm Bill: Wisconsin Focus Title X: Horticulture and Organic Agriculture (The Specialty Crops Title)¹



Specialty crops is the term the USDA uses to describe “fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, and nursery crops (including floriculture).” The economic importance of specialty crops has grown—fruits, vegetables, and tree nuts now account for almost one-third of farm cash receipts from crops. For the 2008 Farm Bill, specialty crop interest groups united and lobbied for federal support for research and education, market and demand enhancement, and other programs to improve the vitality and competitiveness for these commodities. Key features of the 2008 Farm Bill pertaining to specialty crops are summarized below.

Market and Demand Enhancement

The new Farmers’ Market Promotion Program allocates funds to improve or expand existing farmer’s markets, roadside stands, community supported agriculture, and other direct-to-consumer marketing of specialty crops. Funding is \$3 million for 2008, \$5 million for 2009 and 2010, and \$10 million for 2011 and 2012. At least 10% of these funds must be used to support use of electronic benefits transfer (i.e. Food Stamps) at farmers’ markets. Details have yet to be released, but these funds will be available to help expand and develop more direct marketing opportunities for farmers and enhance access to locally produced food for everyone.

Funding increases substantially for USDA Section 32 purchases of specialty crops, which are used for child nutrition and similar programs such as school lunches coordinated by the USDA. Section 32 purchases of specialty crop have been \$200 million annually, but will increase to \$390 million in 2008, with an additional \$3-\$6 million increase each year, for a total of \$991 million over the next five years. These purchases are intended to increase demand for not only fresh produce, but also processed fruits and vegetables, and to increase access to healthier foods.

Funding for the Market Access Program (MAP) continues at \$200 million annually. MAP helps producers, exporters, private companies, and other trade organizations finance promotional activities for U.S. agricultural products by encouraging the development, maintenance, and expansion of commercial export markets. Funded activities include consumer promotions, market research, technical assistance, and trade servicing. Funding for the Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops (TASC) program annually increases from its base of \$4 million in 2008 to reach \$9 million by 2012. TASC helps organizations address sanitary, phytosanitary, and technical barriers that prohibit or threaten U.S. specialty crop exports. Examples of funded activities include seminars and workshops, study tours, field surveys, pest and disease research, and pre-clearance programs.

Research and Education

Funding for Specialty Crop Block Grants starts at \$10 million for 2008, increases to \$49 million in 2009, and then rises to \$55 million in 2010-2012. States receive block grants to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by funding projects such as research, promotion, marketing, nutrition, trade enhancement, food safety, food security, plant health programs, education, buy local programs, increased consumption, increased innovation, improved efficiency and reduced

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costs of distribution systems, environmental concerns and conservations, product development, and developing cooperatives. Traditionally, this has been flexible funding allocated as each state deems best. The 2008 Farm Bill also establishes the Specialty Crop Research Initiative to competitively award grants addressing research needs for specialty crops. Funding is \$30 million for 2008, and \$50 million annually for 2009-2012, which is substantial funding relative to other USDA research initiatives. Details are expected soon when the 2008 request for applications is announced.

New funding for pest and disease programs is large (\$377 million over ten years), divided among several new programs. Among these is a new Plant Pest and Disease Program to fund various surveillance and prevention activities for invasive pests and diseases, including joint federal and state programs for early detection and management of emerging problems. Proactive certification systems are also established with cooperation between USDA, state departments of agriculture, and growers, plus the new farm bill creates the National Clean Plant Network as a source of certified diseases and pest free plant stocks for propagation and planting.

Base Acres Planting Flexibility Pilot

A pilot program is established to allow farmers in seven Midwestern states to plant select processing vegetables on commodity program base acres without losing commodity program benefits, except that base acres are temporarily reduced for each acre of vegetables planted.

Organic Agriculture

Organic agriculture also received attention in the 2008 Farm Bill. \$22 million in funding is included for the Organic Certification Cost-Share Program (it had been funded at \$5 million previously) and the annual maximum is increased to \$750 per grower. Also, \$5 million is allocated to improve collect of organic production and marketing data. In addition, funding for the National Organic Program, which handles certification and overall regulation of the industry including labelling, increases from \$5 million in 2008 to \$11 million by 2012.

How is Wisconsin Affected?

Wisconsin is a major producer of specialty crops, such as processing vegetables, potatoes, and cranberries, plus it has a relatively large number of organic farms, farmers' markets, produce auctions, and packing sheds. As a result, the Wisconsin specialty crop industry has much to gain from these new Farm Bill programs and initiatives. Funds will become available for farmers' markets to expand and improve in quality and to help growers transition to organic production. Specialty Crop Block Grants have historically funded several successful projects and the number of these will expand with the availability of additional funds. Industries such as ginseng and potatoes have also successfully obtained MAP and TASC funds to enhance global marketing and such opportunities will increase. The planting flexibility pilot allows 9,000 acres of processing vegetables on base acres in Wisconsin to help vegetable processing industry remain competitive here as commodity prices continue to climb. All Wisconsin farmers will benefit from improved detection and prevention and coordinated management of invasive pests and diseases.

Where can I get more information?

House Committee [Fact Sheet](#)

Senate Committee [Fact Sheet](#)

Subtitle X of the 2008 Farm Bill: [Horticulture and Organic Agriculture](#)

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