

# The Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008

## Title X – Horticulture and Organic Agriculture

- **SUPPORTS GROWTH OF FARMERS' MARKETS:** The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 established the Farmers' Market Promotion Program, which provides targeted grants to help promote and improve farmers' markets, roadside stands, and other direct producer-to-consumer marketing opportunities. These markets have created important opportunities for farmers to market and consumers to obtain fresh, local, healthy foods. The program has been funded at \$1 million a year through appropriations bills, and the bill provides a \$33 million boost in mandatory funding – increasing annual funding to \$10 million by fiscal year 2011 – to develop and expand farmers markets across the country.
- **ASSISTS FARMERS TRANSITIONING TO ORGANIC PRODUCTION:** Organic agriculture is one of the fastest growing sectors of American agriculture, but many producers face challenges as they try to transition to organic production. The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 established the National Organic Certification Cost-Share program, which assists producers and handlers of agricultural products in becoming certified for organic production and processing. The bill provides \$22 million in mandatory funding over the next five years for this important initiative – an increase of \$17 million from the \$5 million in the 2002 bill.
- **REQUIRES USDA ORGANIC DATA COLLECTION:** Comprehensive, national data on production prices and market trends is a critical tool for producers and USDA. Farmers need this information to market their products effectively, and USDA uses this data for providing crop insurance policies to producers and setting premium rates. Unfortunately, this information is seriously lacking in the organic sector. In order to address this significant data gap, the bill invests \$5 million in a USDA data collection initiative to help collect and report national market data for organic products.
- **EXPANDS SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANTS:** The Specialty Crop Block Grant Program provides funds to state departments of agriculture for the purpose of enhancing the competitiveness of United States growers of fruits, vegetables, and other horticultural crops in areas such as marketing, promotion, education, research, trade, and nutrition. The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 provides a significant investment in this popular program of approximately \$500 million, bringing annual spending to \$55 million a year by 2010 – an increase of \$46.5 million over the amount provided for this program in the fiscal year 2008 appropriations bill.

- **CREATES AND FUNDS A NEW PLANT PEST AND DISEASE INITIATIVE:** Invasive species – such as the light brown apple moth – pose a significant risk to U.S. agriculture and the environment. These pests, which feed on leaves, trees, and agricultural crops, can devastate the environment and agricultural producers' finances. The bill provides roughly \$400 million for a new Pest and Disease Program which will provide funding to state departments of agriculture that develop a cooperative agreement with USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) for the purpose of combating invasive species and other threats to plant health.
- **ESTABLISHES THE NATIONAL CLEAN PLANT NETWORK:** Plant materials, such as rootstock for crops including apples, peaches, grapes, and other fruits provided by nurseries to orchards and vineyards, can be particularly vulnerable to viruses. Additionally, with the reduction of Hatch Act funds for land-grant universities in recent years, many universities have greatly decreased their funding for important plant pathogen research to prevent the infestation of plant materials. To ensure that America's nurseries can continue to provide safe, virus-free plant materials to orchards, vineyards, and other growers, the bill provides \$20 million in mandatory funding to help the Secretary establish a national network of clean plant centers in the United States that will conduct diagnostic and pathogen elimination services for plant materials.
- **HELPS DOMESTIC ASPARAGUS PRODUCERS:** The bill provides \$15 million in mandatory funding to establish an asparagus market loss program to help compensate U.S. asparagus producers for losses suffered due to imports. The program will help these producers invest in more efficient planting and harvesting equipment to increase their ability to compete in the domestic asparagus market.