

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 18, 2025

The Honorable Brooke Rollins
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Rollins:

Thank you for your strong leadership for rural America and United States agriculture. We are eager to support your work to elevate farmers across America to produce the freshest, safest, and most affordable crops that feed this nation. We represent the United States specialty crop sector, encompassing the growers, shippers, packers, handlers, and processors of over 500 fresh fruits, vegetables, and tree nuts—key components of healthy diets and essential to providing nutritious food for American families.

As you continue to set priorities for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), we ask you to prioritize the protection of these crops from pests and diseases. Prevention is the most effective tool for specialty crop agriculture to remain robust and successful; once an invasive species enters the United States and proliferates, the cost to eradicate and the damage to specialty crops grows exponentially. We ask for your support to prioritize the Agricultural Research Service and Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service funding and staff levels to continue the important work of protecting our Nation's farms from pests and disease.

Our farmers have emphasized the importance of maintaining strong border protections and a robust infrastructure for invasive pest prevention to avoid the resurgence of costly and damaging outbreaks like these seen in recent years:

- In the summer of 2023, California was inundated with an unusually high population and diversity of exotic fruit flies, an imported pest that threatened to cripple California's more than 16-billion-dollar specialty crop industry. With the support of APHIS, local quarantine and eradication measures were put in place to prevent statewide spread of the Queensland Fruit Fly, Tau Fly, Mediterranean Fruit Fly, and Oriental Fruit Fly across nine counties in California.
- Even with existing border protection programs, Florida still records an average of one to two exotic invasive species each month. One example of this is Thrips which has spread across the state and due to its size is very challenging to detect, often only noticed once it's too late. In November 2024, a south Florida farmer lost an entire pepper crop valued at more than \$1.3 million to this pest. Thrips has since been detected on 43 species of plants including vegetable, fiber, and ornamental crops.

- The Diamondback moth (*Plutella xylostella*) (DBM) is the single most damaging and problematic pest threatening California's \$1.4B brassica crop industry (i.e. broccoli, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, kale, etc.) of which California is a sole supplier for the United States. This year, farmers are facing, on average, crop losses between 20-60%, pest control costs increasing by over 50%, and lost contracts and increased labor costs to deal with sorting through unmarketable products lost to this pest.

These are just a select few recent examples of invasive species challenges to American agriculture, and we need USDA's leadership to sufficiently protect our borders and maintain the effectiveness of existing monitoring efforts for invasive species. Accordingly, we recommend the following:

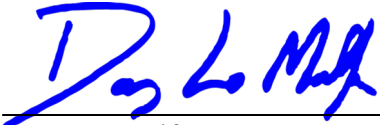
- Maintain APHIS Plant and Pest Quarantine (PPQ) Resources and Expertise
 - PPQ is vital to protecting specialty crops from invasive pest and plant species, and no other federal agency or state function can fulfil this role. By operating, both domestically and abroad, APHIS PPQ actions keep harmful pests and diseases from entering and establishing in the U.S. and causing economic harm to farmers across the country.
- Continue to support the Agricultural Research Service (ARS)
 - ARS plays a crucial role in disease resistant varietal development, especially regional research centers, helping to sustain and advance the Nation's specialty crop industry.
- Maintain resources for intrusion management, including dog teams at our Nation's borders
 - Dog teams have been shown to be one of the most effective prevention tools we have available against the intrusion of invasive species before they become a problem.
- Support eradication research
 - As invasive species and threats evolve, improving eradication techniques and tools, such as traps, monitoring devices, and sterile insect development will provide faster, cheaper, and more effective methods to detect, trap, and eliminate these threats.

The success of our domestic specialty crop industry is in lock step with the Make America Healthy Again agenda, ensuring affordable and readily available access to American grown fresh fruits and vegetables nationwide.

Agriculture is key to ensuring a healthy and affordable food system, and we are grateful for the USDA's continued support of the agriculture industry. We look forward to continuing our work together as we develop and implement positive solutions to meet our shared goals, strengthening domestic food security and sustaining family farms across America.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



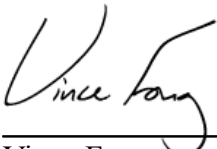
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