

SPECIALTY CROP COALITION

Hop Growers of Washington ❖ Washington Association of Wine Grape Growers ❖ Washington Fruit Commission
Washington Growers Clearing House ❖ Washington State Horticultural Association ❖ Washington State Potato Commission
Wenatchee Valley Traffic Association ❖ Yakima Valley Growers-Shippers Association

Jim Jesernig, Director
Department of Agriculture
PO Box 42560
Olympia, WA 98504

August 17, 2001

Dear Director Jesernig:

As you are aware, this is a challenging time for Washington State's family farms – low prices, low producer returns, foreign trade barriers, devastating droughts and severe summer storms are challenging the industry's economic viability. However, the recent passage of a federal farm emergency aid package, which includes a \$9.6 million block grant for Washington's specialty crops, provides an opportunity to help bolster and strengthen Washington agriculture today and into the future.

As representatives of the state's most valuable specialty crops – apples, cherries, hops, pears, potatoes, and wine grapes, we have formed this coalition of specialty crops to outline our priorities on how the state should spend this money. We believe these funds should be used in a manner that addresses critical needs, provides the greatest benefit to the entire industry, and improves the industry's long-term economic health, rather than diluting this funding by dividing it commodity by commodity for short-term purposes.

We have identified five specific proposals that meet these important objectives. We would recommend that the state target the majority of the block grant funds to the following issues: increasing water storage, water management, improving per capita consumption of fruit and vegetables, promoting the environmental stewardship of growers and helping reduce international trade barriers. Attached is a more detailed description of the five proposals.

Over the years, we have worked to promote these issues with state leaders. There is no argument that water storage, trade barriers and the other issues listed are critical issues that threaten the future health of agriculture. The limiting factor to adequately address these issues has been a lack of resources. This block grant provides the necessary horsepower to finally move these projects forward and begin strengthening Washington's agricultural sector.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

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Contact: Jim Hazen, Washington State Horticultural Association – 509-665-9641

Specialty Crop Initiatives – We have identified five agricultural initiatives that address critical needs, provide the greatest benefit to the entire industry, and improve the industry’s long-term economic viability. It’s worth noting that the following proposals provide an opportunity to launch initiatives that will pay dividends not just in the short-term, but provide a framework to begin restoring and strengthening Washington agriculture for the long-term.

Water Storage Feasibility Studies - \$2 million

Allocate funding for Water Storage Feasibility Studies in watersheds coming under tremendous pressure from environmental concerns due to the Endangered Species Act and the Clean Water Act. We would recommend funding feasibility studies in at least three critical areas: Yakima, Chelan and Okanogan counties. Feasibility studies would finally move this important issue from the discussion stage to the planning stage.

Water Management and Quality Grants - \$1 million

Establish a grant program for agricultural producers and/or commodity groups to fund environmental and technological enhancements to help producers improve water management, conservation or water quality programs.

“Buy Washington” Program Fund - \$1.5 million

Establish a four-year “Buy Washington” Program that promotes Washington’s producers and the state’s valuable agricultural sector to the general public in Washington State. The program, used in other states, brings together the state, agricultural commodity groups, and retailers to promote the positive aspects of agricultural producers and their products. The program would promote environmental stewardship, the value of the state’s agricultural industry to the economy, and the need to purchase Washington agriculture products to support in-state producers. The farm aid bill provides \$500,000 immediately to “support activities that promote agriculture.” The additional money would allow the state to put in place an on-going program – a four-year commitment – to build public awareness and support for Washington agriculture and agricultural products.

Trade Barrier Assistance Fund - \$1.5 million

Establish an on-going fund to provide agriculture commodity groups with matching grants to fight trade barrier disputes. The economic health of Washington’s agricultural industry depends on our ability to open new markets for our products. This fund will help Washington’s agricultural industry reduce trade barriers that stand in the way of new and emerging trade markets.

Produce for Better Health Fund - \$1 million

Help establish an endowment fund through the Produce for Better Health Foundation to increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables. Washington producers need greater per capita consumption of fruits and vegetables to help boost low returns on most agricultural products. The Produce for Better Health Foundation is a national group that seeks to increase consumption of fruits and vegetables in an effort to improve the health of all citizens. One of the foundation’s current programs is the “5 A Day Campaign” aimed at encouraging people to eat healthier. A contribution from Washington State, matched with contributions from California and Florida would give a substantial boost to this effort.