



Comments by Mike Bruorton,  
for U.S. House of Representatives Agriculture Committee Listening Session.  
Gainesville, FL – June 24, 2017

Chairman Conaway, members of the committee and distinguished guests,

I am Mike Bruorton, Director of Agricultural Operations for Superior Berries Company, in Fargo, GA. At Superior Berries we manage several operations including 500 Acres of blueberries and over 1800 hives of pollinators.

I come to you today as President of the Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association, and representing over 500 hundred fruit and vegetable growers in Georgia and throughout the Southeast.

I want to thank you, Chairman Conaway, for holding one of your listening sessions in the southeast. Our southeastern agriculture is different from our farming brothers and sisters in the mid-west and on the Pacific coast. We appreciate you being here to hear our comments today.

There are a number of areas and programs in the farm bill that provide tremendous support for our southeastern growers. Of particular interest to our members and specialty crop growers is research.

The Specialty Crop Research Initiative – SCRI is a very important component of the farm bill funding. Research for specialty crops is growing in importance. This growth will likely accelerate over the life of the next farm bill based on needs from our growers and our industry.

Reports from USDA show nearly 25% of the Specialty Crop Block grant awards have been directed to research projects over the past 5 years. And during this farm bill cycle the effective funds available for specialty crop projects in SCRI has peaked at \$55 million per year when the

citrus greening research commitment is excluded. We are most appreciative of these funds and their support of research.

However, the specialty crop industry has been historically underserved by the various general research governmental programs. Over the next five years we know there will be a need for more funds to provide the needed research into automation, mechanization and related harvesting efficiency technologies to ease our lack of labor. We know food safety research will be a high priority area so the new FSMA regulations can be based on sound science.

We would ask that you increase the level of funding for the Specialty Crop Research Initiative. It is needed to keep our industry competitive and consumers supplied with fresh fruits and vegetables.

By working together as an industry with adequate funding levels we believe great progress can be made to address many of our specialty crop industry issues.

In closing, I want to thank this committee for following our industry's recommendations in the 2013 Farm Bill and establish a formal relevancy review panel as a required criteria in awarding the research grants.

This process has worked extremely well and has insured the projects funded are critical to the industry as well as the most important projects for our growers.

On behalf of our southeastern fruit and vegetable growers and the Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association I want to thank you for holding this listening session.

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Comments by Bill Brim,  
for U.S. House of Representatives Agriculture Committee Listening Session.  
Gainesville, FL – June 24, 2017

Chairman Conaway, members of the committee and distinguished guests,

My name is Bill Brim, Co-Owner of Lewis Taylor Farms in Tifton, Ga. We are a diversified specialty crop farming operation with over 6000 Acres of mixed vegetables, watermelons, cantaloupes and broccoli. We also grow over 325 million vegetable transplants and 70 million containerized pine seedlings annually.

I also want to thank you Chairman Conaway and members of the committee for scheduling a listening session in the southeast.

I will limit my comments to two areas of particular interest to our Georgia growers.

The specialty crop block grant program provides funds to the state departments of agriculture to address the needs of specialty crop growers at the local level. Georgia receives about 1.4 million in grant funds annually.

The Block Grant program has recently been under attack regarding the types of project that have received awards. To preserve the integrity of the program we would encourage this committee to provide stronger and more clear language about the program priorities that would ensure grant projects truly “enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops”.

We believe the block grant program has been well utilized in GA. The program has funded multiple different projects to help specialty growers at the state level . . . with product marketing, grower education, food safety training, farm to school student projects and applied research grants. We strongly urge you to maintain this very important program and increase the funding so we can build on its success.

I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to mention our continuing need for Congress to resolve our Number 1 agricultural issue that handicaps growth of the industry– labor. I realize this is an issue that is not under the jurisdiction of this committee but if we don't solve this problem, this committee may not have an industry to serve at some point in the future.

I have been using the H2A program since 1997 and it continues to be expensive, bureaucratic and inefficient. Recently Congressmen Scott, Congressman Allen and Congressman Bishop (if he is present) along with eight other members of our Georgia congressional delegation, sent a letter to Secretary of Labor Acosta outlining seven items that we believe could make a significant difference in the operation of the H2A program. We believe this can be accomplished with regulatory changes and does not require congressional action to fix the H2A program.

However, long term we support a legislative fix for our overall immigration problems. Our organization stands ready to help and work with you in any way possible to address our labor issues.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. I'll be happy to provide a copy of these comments to you for the record.

Bill Brim  
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