

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 4, 2018

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
328A Senate Russell Building

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
328A Senate Russell Building

Dear Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow,

As the Senate Agriculture Committee moves toward finalizing the 2018 farm bill, we request an increase in funding for the Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) in the upcoming farm bill. As you know, this program identifies and funds important research for the specialty crop industry's phytosanitary and production issues, and is critical for ensuring that our producers are protected from diseases, pests, and other food production challenges.

This initiative is currently authorized at \$80 million annually, with \$25 million in dedicated funding for citrus health research. Unfortunately, the program is already incredibly over-subscribed, with only 10 percent of the submitted projects submitted receiving funding. Limited funding makes it difficult to get ahead of the issues facing the industry, such as strengthening crop characteristics, improving production efficiency, combating pests and disease that can decimate crops, and food safety.

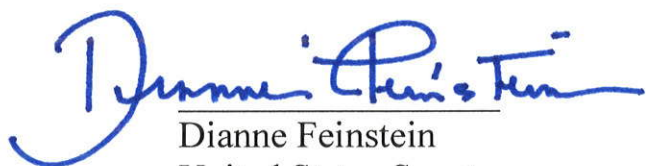
Many breakthroughs, such as the recent work at Texas A&M University on new rose species hybrids that are immune to Rose Rosette disease, have been funded by this program, but many crops continue to have serious production problems. Apple and ornamental tree growers are looking for new tools to combat Spotted Lantern Fly, potato growers are in need of a cure for the zebra chip disease, and citrus growers have not yet found a cure for the devastating Huanglongbing (HLB) disease even as important progress to that end is being made. Florida continues to struggle with the loss of citrus production caused by HLB, and Arizona, Texas and California have taken rapid action to prevent the disease from spreading to other citrus production areas. The citrus industry has

made substantial investments to find a cure for the disease, and the \$25 million in funding through SCRI is a key component in these efforts.

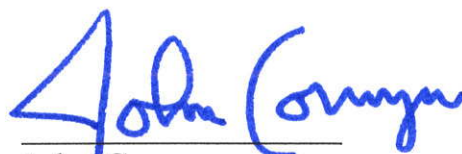
These examples are just a few of the many crops that benefit from the SCRI program. We ask that the committee include additional funding for the Specialty Crop Research Initiative, while maintaining current citrus-specific funding levels in order to meet the increasing research needs of specialty crop producers. These production and phytosanitary obstacles inhibit the growth of U.S. agriculture and specialty crop producers in a global marketplace, and SCRI is one of the best tools we have to help farmers face the challenges of the future.

Thank you for considering our request. We look forward to working with you to bring a bipartisan product to the floor that supports critical programs that are important for the continued success of specialty crops.

Sincerely,



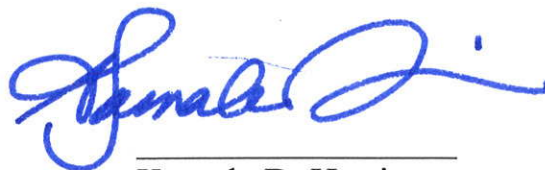
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United States Senator



John Cornyn
United States Senator



Bill Nelson
United States Senator



Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator



Marco Rubio
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