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November 6, 2012

The Honorable Karen Ross
California Department of Food and Agriculture
1220 N Street, Suite 400
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Secretary Ross:

On behalf of the California State Board of Food and Agriculture, attached please find a summary of findings and recommendations concerning California's Specialty Crop Block Grant Program.

In accordance with our statutory authority to, "confer and advise with the Governor and Secretary," (Food & Agricultural Code 951) on agricultural and consumer issues we offer the following information in connection with the program.

Sincerely,

Craig McNamara
President



Findings and Recommendations Concerning California Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

The California State Board of Food and Agriculture has made the following findings and recommendations associated with the California Specialty Crop Block Grant Program. These findings and recommendations are a result of testimony, presentations, and discussion that occurred at the October 2, 2012 meeting of the Board.

- The California Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) is an important vehicle for addressing issues specific to California's specialty crops, the State's policy objectives, and aligns well with the California Agricultural Vision

California should maintain a leadership role in advocating for continued federal funding for the SCBGP and other programs, such as the Specialty Crop Research Initiative, that increase the long term economic viability within the agricultural sector. As of September 30, 2012 – the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) can no longer administer the SCBGP and other programs that benefit the specialty crop industry because of the expiration of the federal farm bill. Secretary Karen Ross, the Board, and the agricultural community should maintain and increase outreach and policy efforts to encourage passage of this important legislation.

- The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) is doing an excellent job in the administration of the SCBGP

It is evident that the CDFA has taken an inclusive approach in the administration of SCBGP. From outreach concerning the program, training/workshops for grant applicants, and a grant application review/recommendation process involving stakeholders. The result of this process has been a consistent and equitable funding approach that benefits the diversity of the specialty crop industry.

- As the largest SCBGP in the nation, CDFA should develop a stakeholder process to conduct an analysis and review of the program

A stakeholder review process of the SCBGP will help to inform CDFA and the Board by examining the multiple objectives of the program, compared with its results. Further, this analysis will provide opportunities to enhance an already strong and equitable program.

- Greater transparency, outreach, and project dissemination is needed in concern to SCBGP projects

Maintaining the integrity, confidentiality and the competitiveness of the SCBGP is essential. In addition, the SCBGP must adhere to the federal rules and requirements of the USDA that is associated with this program. To the extent possible, CDFA should develop a process that (1) provides greater feedback to denied grant applicants; (2) requires public dissemination of project results (i.e. research, findings, and reports) – ensuring that information generated with federal funds is broadly shared; (3) encourages farmer/grower outreach on each project; and (4) provide CDFA funding targets for each SCBGP priority grant areas.

- Maintain equity among all SCBGP goals – reflecting the diversity, innovation and economic needs of California agriculture


California agriculture has many market opportunities as well as competitive pressures. Providing SCBGP priority to one or a few sub-segments of our diverse industry limits overall advancement of the specialty crop sector. Research, marketing, and nutrition should remain the key funding areas of the program. In addition, the “*California Agricultural Vision: Strategies for Sustainability*” should be used as a guidance document for the program.

APPROVED:


CRAIG MCNAMARA
President
California State Board of Food and Agriculture

DATE: 11/6/12

ATTEST:


JOSHUA EDDY
Executive Director
California State Board of Food and Agriculture