

Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008
Farm Bill
Final Report – Florida

The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (HR 2419) contains many provisions that are both wise national policy and which will have strong benefits for Florida agriculture in particular.

Below is a summary:

Block Grants - \$466 million

- Florida would be the 2nd largest recipient based on specialty crop production.
- Block grants provide Florida flexibility to meet the unique farming challenges of our state, targeting specialty crops, including fruits, vegetables and nursery, to support projects in marketing, research, education, pest/disease management, production, nutrition, food safety and other local priorities.

Fruits and Vegetables - \$230 million

- Establishes a mandatory Specialty Crop Research Initiative to help meet Florida's pressing research challenges such as developing pest and disease resistant crops, mitigation of threats posed by invasive species, improved production systems and harvesting techniques, conservation water, and development of new and innovative marketing opportunities for Florida goods.
- Maintains funding for USDA Market Access Program (MAP) to assist producers in Florida and other states in accessing foreign markets for their products. Florida Department of Citrus utilizes MAP funding to assist with international marketing efforts.

Nutrition - \$10.361 billion

- \$1.25 billion for the Emergency Food Assistance Program. At this time of rising food insecurity, the bill substantially increases funding for emergency feeding organizations such as food banks, food pantries and soup kitchen, providing assistance to nearly 800,000 Floridians each year.
- Increasing the amount of fruits and vegetables in the diets of Americans, and specifically our schoolchildren, is the type of innovative approach that will be the key to addressing the nation's childhood obesity problem. This will also create a significant market for fruits and vegetables grown by Florida farmers.

Pest and Diseases - \$377 million

- Florida knows all too well the costs associated with a devastating agricultural pest or disease. Initiated by Florida, the bill establishes Pest and Disease Program for first time in Farm Bill, to conduct early pest detection and surveillance activities in coordination with state departments of agriculture, to prioritize and create action plans to address pest and disease threats to specialty crops, and to create an audit-based certification approach to protect against the spread of invasive pests.

Conservation Programs – Increases total spending by \$7.9 billion

- Includes significant conservation and environmental programs that will ensure the natural resource concerns of Florida are addressed including water quality and wildlife habitat. Addresses area of special environmental significance, including Florida's Everglades.
- Provides \$3.4 billion for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). This program has been the most widely utilized conservation program in Florida and offers technical and financial assistance to farmers and ranchers to install or implement conservation practices to protect water, air and soil quality.
- Creates the Cooperative Conservation Program Initiative (CCPI) to provide assistance to producers by coordinating conservation activities between USDA and state and local programs (Congressmen Mahoney & Putnam initiated this program)

Sugar

- Increase the sugar loan rate by .75 cents over five years. (From 18 cents to 18.75 cents) The first increase in 20 years. Set up a Feedstock Flexibility Program for Bioenergy Production to utilize sugar for Bioenergy production to ensure no net cost of sugar program.

Ethanol Loan Guarantee Program

- \$320 million in loan guarantees for the construction of biorefineries for meeting our nation's growing energy needs by giving Florida farmers financial incentives in the form of a loan guarantee for the construction of cellulosic biofuel plants. This will create jobs and a new market for agricultural waste in Florida.

Adjusted Gross Income (AGI)

- Addresses the unique attributes of Florida agricultural production in qualifying for conservation and disaster aid, while putting reforms in place to prohibit payments to wealthy non-farm recipients.
- There is a \$1,000,000 cap on non-farm income for conservation programs. The cap is waived if at least 66.66% of income is derived from agricultural production. The USDA secretary can also waive this cap.

Other

- ◆ The 2008 farm bill, which spans a five-year period, strengthens country-of-origin labeling rules for fruits, vegetables and meats imported into the United States after Sept. 30.
- ◆ The bill also would create permanent assistance for farmers hurt by weather disasters. This includes tropical fish farms.

