

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 22, 2024

The Honorable Glenn 'GT' Thompson  
Chairman  
House Committee on Agriculture

The Honorable David Scott  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Agriculture

Dear Chairman Thompson and Ranking Member Scott,

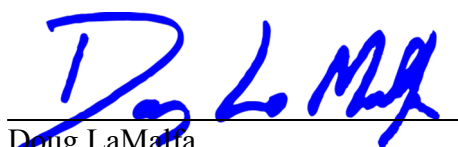
As the committee continues its work to reauthorize the Farm Bill, we write to elevate the importance of supporting the competitiveness and longevity of our U.S. specialty crop industry. The need for agricultural technology and innovation has never been greater, and we urge that any multi-year Farm Bill bolster federal support and financial resources for mechanization and automation research and development.

In the specialty crop sector, manual labor remains the predominant method to plant, manage, and harvest fresh fruits, fresh vegetables, and ornamental crops. Unfortunately, this reliance on hand-harvesting leads to higher grower production costs compared to other agriculture sectors. According to the USDA-Economic Research Service, labor costs comprise on average 40-70 percent of total expenses for specialty crop farms, compared to just under 15 percent for all of agriculture. This puts the U.S. specialty crop sector at a huge disadvantage due to ongoing labor trends of shrinking availability and rising costs, trends that are expected to worsen in the future.

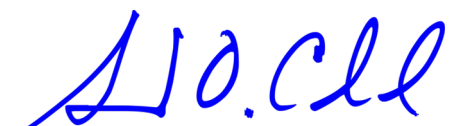
The development and incorporation of innovative and accessible technology is therefore more critical than ever, both to bridge the gaps left by the shortage of human hands and equip the existing workforce with modern solutions to enhance their skill sets. With dedicated federal funding and attention, we can better attract the private investment and ingenuity necessary to accelerate breakthroughs and commercialization. Such efforts will not only provide for the long-term viability of homegrown farming operations, but also ensure our current and next-generation agricultural workforce can be supported and successful in our own communities.

The Committee's support is essential in ensuring our producers can continue providing healthy and affordable food to consumers, both domestically and overseas. We thank you for your work and remain jointly committed to delivering a Farm Bill that supports innovation and competitiveness for all our nation's farmers.


Sincerely,



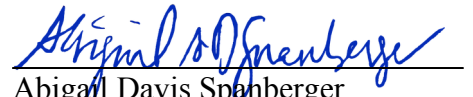
Doug LaMalfa  
Member of Congress



Salud Carbajal  
Member of Congress



Max L. Miller  
Member of Congress



Abigail Davis Spanberger  
Member of Congress



David G. Valadao  
Member of Congress



John S. Duarte  
Member of Congress



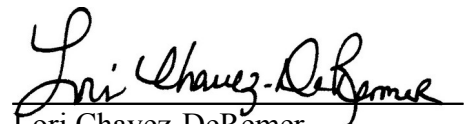
Jimmy Panetta  
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Andrea Salinas  
Member of Congress



Josh Harder  
Member of Congress




Lori Chavez-DeRemer  
Member of Congress



C. Scott Franklin  
Member of Congress



Austin Scott  
Member of Congress



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Julia Brownley  
Member of Congress




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Elissa Slotkin  
Member of Congress



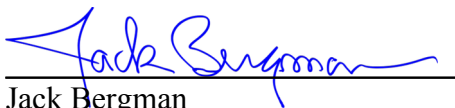
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John H. Rutherford  
Member of Congress




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Lisa C. McClain  
Member of Congress




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Jack Bergman  
Member of Congress



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Bill Posey  
Member of Congress




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Chellie Pingree  
Member of Congress



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Raul Ruiz, M.D.  
Member of Congress




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Jim Costa  
Member of Congress



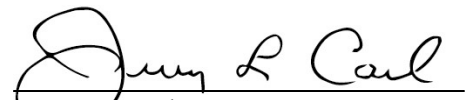
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Ken Calvert  
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Jared Huffman  
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Jerry L. Carl  
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John R. Moolenaar  
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Yadira Caraveo, M.D.  
Member of Congress



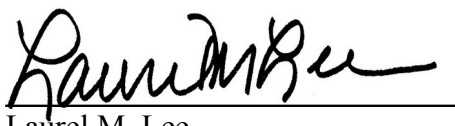
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Chuck Edwards  
Member of Congress



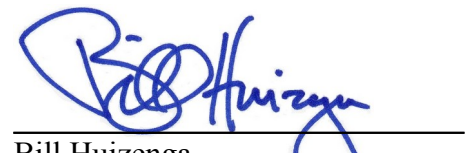
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Earl Blumenauer  
Member of Congress



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Laurel M. Lee  
Member of Congress



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Bill Huizenga  
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