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What is the Status of Other Programs Affecting Specialty Crops?

BACKGROUND

The organics, pest and disease, and disaster programs for specialty crops are a continuation of programs first established in the 2008 Farm Bill. While some programs have come and gone, these remain popular among specialty crop growers and organizations.

Organics

Organic agriculture received additional funding for research in the last Farm Bill. In addition, organic agriculture received \$5 million to improve data collection to provide policymakers the data necessary to make sound policy and for organic businesses to make better business decisions. Organic producers also received expanded exemptions for commodity check-off programs. The National Organic Program now has more enforcement authority to guarantee compliance for products bearing the USDA label. Producers are given cost-share assistance to help offset annual certification costs.

Plant Pests

The Plant Pest and Disease Management and Disaster Prevention Programs authorized in the Farm Bill provide protection to U.S. agriculture and natural resources from foreign plant pest threats in areas such as pest survey, identification, inspection, mitigation, risk analysis, and public education and outreach. The National Clean Plant Network, where clean plant materials are stored throughout the U.S., was merged into this program. Overall funding is \$62.5 million per year through FY 2017, and \$74 million in FY 2018.

Tree Assistance

The Tree Assistance Program (TAP) provides financial assistance to qualifying orchardists and nursery tree growers that have suffered losses in excess of 15 percent to replant or rehabilitate eligible trees, bushes and vines damaged by natural disasters. The 2014 Farm Bill makes TAP a permanent disaster program. Payments to producers are issued after an application process, with no fee. There is a limit of \$125,000 per year per producer and, to be eligible for a payment, a producer's total adjusted gross income cannot exceed \$900,000. TAP has unlimited funding and \$18.6 million in payments have been made from October 2011 through March 2016.