



U.S. House Agriculture Committee Hearing, "An Examination of the State of the Specialty Crop Industry."

Comments by Michael Frantz of Frantz Wholesale Nursery

Good morning, Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member Craig and members of the committee. Thank you all for the opportunity to be here today. My name is Michael France, and I'm the co-owner of Frantz Wholesale Nursery, a family farm founded by my parents nearly 50 years ago, we grow trees and shrubs, perennials and grasses, and sell them to Landscape Contractors in various retail outlets across the western United States. I have served for over 15 years as a director to the Turlock Irrigation District, a public utility that serves water and power to my community. I've also served for many years as the chair of the advocacy committee for AmericanHort, the premier federal trade association for the horticultural industry. I have traveled to Washington many times over the last 25 years, consistently advocating for bipartisan solutions that would provide a stable and legal workforce for agriculture and reasonable water policies for the West.

I realize these topics are outside the jurisdiction of this committee, but both remain top priorities for the specialty crop industry, and to me, personally, I have submitted a longer, more detailed written testimony to the committee, foundational to my comments today, the specialty crop industry does not seek commodity price supports. Consumers value our quality crops and pay a fair price generally sufficient to pay our bills, but there are key areas where government support is vital, which I will try to outline today,

We struggle to find effective insurance to mitigate the enormous risk we growers take in our nursery. We grow over 700 varieties of plants and have up to 10,000 individual crops growing at any given time. Some crops only reside on our farm for a few weeks, while others will grow as long as eight years from sowing the acorn until we ship the half-grown oak tree to our customer. All our crops are highly perishable and vulnerable to weather and economic variability. Crop insurance for catastrophic and nature related events are in place for Title One crops. But these programs rarely work well for us because of our extreme crop diversity, affordable crop insurance programs that can provide disaster relief for unique specialty crop farmers like myself are needed while we do our best to prevent the need for quarantines. Much of the quarantine process is out of our hands. We grow potted citrus trees, a crop highly regulated by USDA to protect commercial citrus farmers, the nursery industry has invested millions of dollars in protective structures to ensure the plants we ship are free of disease. But even small changes in the regulation of movement of citrus can block multiyear crops access to markets, potentially resulting in millions of dollars of losses. Essentially overnight, I'm happy to see pilot insurance programs to cover government-imposed quarantine risks are getting started, but they need refinement to be useful. I respectfully ask that you continue to fund this vital risk mitigation tool.

We continue to lose crop protection tools each year, and replacements are slow to fill the void. IR-4 research dollars were not funded in your last budget bill. They are critical to advance new pest and disease options for us, and I respectfully ask that you include IR funding in the next farm bill. The recent marketing assistance for specialty crops, MASC funding, helped us with our substantial increase in costing. I understand that some of you on this committee were essential in getting the payments out this year. Thank you for your help, as this ad hoc funding source will hopefully play a vital support role in future years, I would ask that this committee consider providing consistent logic for what and who would qualify for additional funding when real needs arise.

Another challenge we face is tariffs on essential inputs that largely cannot be sourced domestically. Many of the crop inputs we depend on, such as peat moss and coconut coir, which are components of our soil mix, must be sourced internationally. I want to thank the chairman and his staff for recognizing this challenge and elevating the need for tariff exemptions on peat moss. Securing that exemption has saved our industry millions of dollars and provided some relief. Still other nonexempt inputs remain subject to tariffs, contributing to macro inflationary pressure that in some cases, is pricing our very discretionary products out of consumers reach.

Thank you for your time and consideration today. In closing, I circle back to my three main issues, the vital need for a stable and legal workforce, a strong safety net to protect us when disasters and quarantine strike, increasing inflationary costs that are pricing our quality, American grown specialty crops out of consumers budgets.

If any of you find yourself in California, I'd invite you for a tour. We would love to have you look forward to your questions.

Watch the full hearing recording [here](#).