

Brooke Rollins Confirmation Questions/Topics

The North American Blueberry Council (NABC) supports President-Elect Trump's nomination of Brooke Rollins for Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. NABC urges the Senate to act promptly in confirming Ms. Rollins' appointment, ensuring the USDA can continue its essential support for U.S. farmers without interruption.

The blueberry industry encourages members of the Senate Agriculture Committee to emphasize the importance and unique needs of the specialty crop sector during Ms. Rollins' confirmation hearing. NABC also recommends inquiring about her perspectives on key issues affecting specialty crop producers.

DISASTER RELIEF

NABC supports the prompt and fair disbursement of disaster relief payments to producers affected by 2023 and 2024. NABC opposes the use of "progressive factoring" to calculate payments.

Producers experienced unprecedented losses due to natural disasters in 2023 and 2024. Congress included \$20 billion in disaster relief funding for agricultural losses as part of the American Relief Act, 2025.

The previous administration applied a "progressive factoring" calculation to determine final payments under the Emergency Relief Program (ERP) 2022. This resulted in growers who incurred the greatest losses receiving a payment comparable to those who's losses were less. This announcement came after months of delays due to a discrimination lawsuit over the Department's initial implementing of ERP 2022. By all accounts, ERP 2022 failed to provide the support our producers desperately needed in the wake of the 2022 natural disasters.

Question: As Secretary, what will you do to ensure that the funding provided by Congress is fairly and expeditiously provided to producers based on incurred losses, due to natural disasters in 2023 and 2024?

LABOR

- *NABC strongly encourages enhanced inter-agency coordination between the USDA and the Department of Labor (DOL). Specifically, NABC supports the establishment of a dedicated position within the USDA to engage with DOL on the implementation of the H-2A program and other labor regulations impacting farmers. A dedicated liaison between agricultural stakeholders and the DOL would greatly benefit the agricultural community, supporting both employers and employees.*

Temporary, vetted and legal labor is a vital component of our shared vision of a food secure U.S. agriculture sector. Labor remains a significant concern for U.S. blueberry growers. While the USDA does not directly oversee the H-2A program or other labor regulations, its mission to "provide economic opportunity through innovation" gives it a critical role in addressing labor challenges. Fruit and vegetable farmers, the largest users of the H-2A program, allocate approximately 38% of their farm expenses to labor—a share that continues to rise as wages increase year after year.

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Question: As USDA Secretary, will you collaborate with the DOL to ensure the fair implementation of labor regulations, including the H-2A program? Will you consider creating a position within the office of the secretary to be a liaison to the Department of Labor on regulations affecting agricultural labor?

- *NABC supports the development of an alternative survey specifically designed to establish the Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR) as required by current law, reflecting actual minimum wages paid to U.S. farmworkers. The current use of the USDA's Farm Labor Survey (FLS) for this purpose is inconsistent with its original intent and creates artificial wage inflation. Until a new survey is implemented, NABC urges the USDA to modify the FLS to reduce this inflation.*

The DOL calculates the Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR) for H-2A workers using the annual average hourly gross wage reported in the USDA Farm Labor Survey (FLS). However, the FLS includes all wages paid to farmworkers, including AEWR-based wages paid to H-2A workers, as well as bonuses, incentive pay, and overtime. This methodology results in a self-inflating minimum wage cycle based on the previous year's gross wage, causing volatile and unsustainable wage increases that threaten the viability of family farms.

The USDA has the authority to adjust the FLS methodology to reduce artificial wage inflation by collecting data on the "base wage" only excluding bonuses, incentive pay, piece rate pay, and overtime from the survey data. Since the AEWR was originally intended as a minimum wage for agricultural work, this adjustment would provide a more accurate reflection of baseline agricultural wages.

- **Question:** As Secretary, will you direct the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) to make the necessary adjustments to the FLS to prevent continued artificial increases in the AEWR? Additionally, will you commit to dedicating resources to the development and implementation of an alternative survey for the DOL to use in establishing the AEWR?

COMMODITY CREDIT CORPORATION

NABC supports preserving the Secretary's discretionary and responsible use of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) to deliver critical assistance to growers in response to market disruptions.

In December 2024, the USDA announced the Market Assistance for Specialty Crops (MASC) Program, designed to provide direct payments to qualified specialty crop producers to offset rising marketing costs, including the increasing expense of farm labor.

Following this, the USDA committed additional funding through the CCC to raise the payment limit—an acknowledgment of the specialty crop sector's unique challenges, such as significant input costs and high-value crops.

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The MASC program was modeled after the highly effective Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP-2) implemented during President Trump's first term, rather than a traditional Farm Act structure, emphasizing the need for a specialized approach to supporting specialty crops.

Question: As USDA Secretary, how would you leverage the CCC to assist producers affected by unforeseen market disruptions, such as trade disputes or retaliatory tariffs?

EXPORT MARKET COMPETITIVENESS

- *NABC strongly encourages USDA to work cooperatively with USTR and the Chief Ag Negotiator to eliminate tariff and non-tariff barriers that place U.S. agriculture at a competitive disadvantage.*

Question: Under your leadership, how will USDA work to eliminate non-tariff barriers that place U.S. agriculture at a competitive disadvantage?

- *NABC supports the continuation of the Regional Agriculture Promotion Program and the Assisting Specialty Crop Exports program.*

Question: Ms. Rollins, will you support the continuation of the Regional Agriculture Promotion Program and the Assisting Specialty Crop Exports programs?

DIETARY GUIDELINES

The federal dietary guidelines recommends that more than half of an American's plate should consist of nutrient dense specialty crops like fruits, vegetables, and tree nuts, yet we historically receive less than half of the farm bill's resources. In fact, the horticulture title of the 2018 farm bill, which includes most programs designed specifically for specialty crops, received less than one half of one percent of farm bill spending according to the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service.

Question: Under your leadership, what steps will the USDA take to incentivize Americans to consume more American grown fruits and vegetables? Please comment on the Dietary Guidelines process and if, or how, it should be changed.