



U.S. Policy Platform



Vision Statement

The North American Blueberry Council (NABC) is a recognized and trusted partner in addressing issues, opportunities and industry practices that drive success and profitability in the production and distribution of blueberries in North America and around the world.



The Blueberry Hill Climb



Introduction

The NABC U.S. Policy Platform represents the collective positions and priorities of U.S. blueberry growers, handlers and marketers, serving as a strategic guide for NABC's policy initiatives.

NABC advocates for the U.S. blueberry industry's interests before Congress, the administration and regulatory agencies to ensure its value and contributions are recognized.

Updated annually by the NABC Government Affairs Committee and approved by the NABC Board of Directors, this Policy Platform addresses key issues critical to the industry, including:

- ★ The Farm Bill and agricultural policy
- ★ Agriculture workforce and labor policy
- ★ International trade and market access
- ★ Conservation and the environment
- ★ Food Safety and labeling
- ★ Nutrition and consumption
- ★ Tax policy

The primary goal of these policy positions – and NABC's overall governmental affairs strategy – is to strengthen the competitiveness of the U.S. blueberry industry.



Farm Bill and Agriculture Policy

NABC supports the timely passage of a comprehensive Farm Bill that meets the needs of U.S. producers and ensures the long-term viability, health and competitiveness of U.S. agriculture.

NABC is a member of the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance, a national coalition of more than 120 organizations representing growers of fruits, vegetables, dried fruit, tree nuts, nursery plants and other products. The alliance seeks to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crop agriculture and improve the health of Americans by broadening the scope of U.S. agricultural public policy.

Additionally, NABC closely follows the appropriations process in Congress. Programs that are authorized but never funded are of no help. Likewise, programs that are deprived during the appropriations process never reach their full potential.



Policy Positions

- ★ Support annual mandatory funding for research and development of mechanization and automation technologies within specialty crops that reduce growers' manual labor requirements and increase the efficiency of crop production, improve resource management and support harvest and post-harvest processes.
- ★ Support improvements to risk management tools, including the Federal Crop Insurance program and disaster assistance programs like the Tree Assistance Program.
- ★ Create a permanent disaster assistance program that ensures appropriated funds are swiftly distributed to producers who have been affected by natural disasters.
- ★ Support the Specialty Crop Block Grant program, which focuses on food safety, plant pests and diseases, research and crop-specific projects to benefit specialty crops.
- ★ Support the Specialty Crop Research Initiative, which addresses critical needs of the specialty crop industry by awarding competitive grants to support research and extension services to help solve challenges of national, regional and multistate importance.
- ★ Support funding for pest and disease research, exclusion and eradication programs.
 - Support funding for the IR-4 Project, which was established by USDA and land grant universities to ensure that specialty crop farmers have legal access to safe and effective crop protection products.
 - Support USDA-APHIS' Agricultural Quarantine and Inspection Program, which protects the U.S. agriculture industry against the introduction of pests and pathogens at ports of entry.
- ★ Support federally authorized and producer-supported research and promotion programs, commonly known as checkoffs, that are established and approved in referenda by producers who fund the programs through mandatory assessments.
- ★ Support USDA programs that promote the consumption of specialty crop products in all forms.
 - Support funding for the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP).
 - Support modernization of USDA's procurement programs to support grower resiliency and ensure recipients have access to produce.
- ★ Support funding for USDA-FAS Trade programs like the Market Access Program (MAP), Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops (TASC), Emerging Markets Program (EMP) and Quality Samples Program.



Agriculture Workforce and Labor Policy

The agriculture industry faces unique employment needs and challenges. The H-2A guest worker program in its current form is not structured to meet these needs. Production agriculture requires sufficient skilled and capable farm labor resources to continue to supply the nation and the world with high-quality, nutritious food.

Farmers must be supported by federal policies and programs that allow for labor needs to be met affordably and efficiently. Federal policies must recognize the unique nature of agricultural work and the need for a flexible workforce to remain competitive globally. Additionally, farm safety is of the highest importance.

Policy Positions

- ★ Support legislation that provides meaningful reforms to the H-2A program, such as:
 - Eliminating agency redundancies.
 - Reducing program costs and administrative requirements.
 - Updating the methodology for establishing the Adverse Effect Wage Rate.
 - Limiting the amount by which the Adverse Effect Wage Rate may increase year to year.
- ★ Support expanding the H-2A program, or creation of a new visa program, to allow employers to bring foreign workers to the U.S. to fill year-round agricultural jobs that cannot be filled by U.S. workers.
- ★ Support an earned pathway to legal status for undocumented people currently working in agriculture.
- ★ Oppose mandatory E-verify unless tied to a pathway for legal status for people currently working in agriculture.
- ★ Support legislation that is consistent with the House-passed 2021 Farm Workforce Modernization Act.
- ★ Support freezing the Adverse Effect Wage Rate.
- ★ Support any effort to improve the methodology by which the Department of Labor establishes the Adverse Effect Wage Rate, including, but not limited to, updating the Farm Labor Survey or the creation of an alternative survey instrument.
- ★ Support efforts to repeal the Department of Labor's 2023 H-2A Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR) Final Rule.
- ★ Oppose any law or regulation that undermines the right of farm workers to decline union membership or in any way empowers union representatives to coerce, intimidate or exploit workers.
- ★ Oppose any law or regulation that grants union representatives access to a farm, agricultural business or employer-provided housing without express permission by the property owner or their designee.
- ★ Support reasonable and practical health and safety protection standards for all farm workers.



International Trade and Market Access

NABC seeks a fair and level playing field for U.S. blueberries in the domestic and global marketplace. USDA Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) market development and promotion programs are vital to maintaining and expanding U.S. agricultural exports, countering subsidized foreign competition, protecting American jobs and strengthening farm income. Accordingly, NABC supports strong market development and promotion programs in pursuit of increased agricultural exports and the farm-level benefits they generate.

Over the past decade, funding for both the FAS and Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) have come under significant pressure due to budget constraints. At the same time, competition in key foreign markets has increased. FAS and APHIS programs are extremely valuable in ensuring that overseas markets remain open and accessible for U.S. agricultural exports.

While we recognize the benefits of multilateral negotiations, the U.S. should continue to engage in bilateral and regional negotiations to improve foreign market access for U.S. agricultural products and reduce tariffs on fresh, frozen, dried and further processed blueberries.

Policy Positions

- ★ Any renegotiation or modernization of existing trade agreements should maintain or expand upon previous gains in agricultural market access, while also making improvements to trade rules that provide for a fair competition with trading partners.
- ★ Support the negotiation of new, comprehensive trade agreements that are beneficial to U.S. farmers and address tariffs, sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) and other non-tariff trade barriers, including geographic indicators.
- ★ Support Congressional renewal of the Trade Promotion Authority (TPA), which enables Congress to define U.S. negotiating objectives and creates an oversight and consultation process so that the administration can pursue trade agreements that help American farmers increase exports and compete in the global economy.
- ★ Support increased funding for USDA-FAS Trade Programs.
- ★ Support funding for USDA-APHIS programs that facilitate export market access and protect the domestic industry from invasive pests and diseases.
- ★ Support funding for the Maximum Residue Limits (MRL) Database. The MRL database contains maximum acceptable levels of pesticides and veterinary drugs in food and agricultural products in the United States, as well as 70 other countries, the European Union and the Codex Alimentarius Commission. Specifically, the database includes more than 300 fruit, vegetable and nut commodities, as well as more than 270 pesticides approved for use on those commodities by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.
- ★ Support legislative and administrative efforts that address tariff and non-tariff barriers that impede the competitiveness of U.S. blueberries in foreign markets.
- ★ Support the elimination of Japan's tariff on frozen U.S. blueberries.
- ★ Support new or improved access to foreign markets for U.S. fresh blueberries.

Conservation and the Environment

NABC supports Farm Bill conservation programs and voluntary incentive-based policies that advance science-backed outcomes, promote resilience and help the agriculture industry better adapt to environmental changes.

While the issues vary, our principles remain: NABC believes conservation programs and environmental regulations should be locally driven and based on scientifically and economically sound practices, and should recognize the unique nature of production agriculture.

However, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has multiple, aggressive regulatory and enforcement initiatives underway that ignore the role of states and affect nearly every aspect of U.S. agriculture. Water quality, air quality, pesticide use and climate change are all subject to major actions that would affect farms and ranches of all sizes.

Policy Positions

- ★ Oppose environmental legislation or regulatory actions that cause adverse impacts to blueberry producers, including increased costs of production.
- ★ Support funding for working lands conservation programs, including those that use voluntary incentive-based conservation practices, to maximize conservation program benefits.
- ★ Support efforts to ensure access to critically needed crop protection products for blueberry producers.
- ★ Support reforms to the Endangered Species Act that would reduce regulatory burdens on farmers and create reliable access to natural resources for agriculture, such as water.
- ★ Support implementation of science-based environmental policies, while minimizing cost and regulatory burdens on farmers.
- ★ Oppose expansion of the jurisdictional reach of the Clean Water Act.



Food Safety and Labeling

America's farmers are committed to providing a safe and affordable food supply for consumers globally. NABC urges that any actions by Congress be based on the best available science and prudent risk assessments.

Policy Positions

- ★ Support food safety legislation and regulations that are based on the best available science, and are risk-based, commodity-specific and applied equitably.
- ★ Ensure that food safety regulations enhance our nation's food security, while avoiding negative impacts to blueberry producers.



Nutrition and Consumption

A large and increasing number of federal dollars are spent to ensure nutritious food is available for our nation's individuals, families and children who rely on federal nutrition programs. America's farmers supply the nation and the world with nutritious and wholesome food. NABC urges that any actions by Congress to update or change nutrition policy be based on best available science and USDA's Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA).

Policy Positions

- ★ Support USDA food and nutrition programs and the continuation of USDA commodity purchases.
- ★ Support strengthening the Buy America provision in the school meals program.
- ★ Support funding for the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP).
- ★ Support a dedicated fruit and vegetable benefit for SNAP participants modeled after the cash value benefit (CVB).
- ★ For all of USDA's nutrition procurement programs, support:
 - Allowing evaluation factors other than lowest cost when awarding a contract.
 - Allowing inspection at the shipping point.
 - Accepting food safety certifications other than the USDA Good Agricultural Practices (GAP).
 - Purchasing a wide variety of specialty crops to address the underconsumption of fruits, vegetables and tree nuts as recognized by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and cited in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA).
- ★ Support continued authorization of the Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR).
- ★ All USDA food and nutrition programs should ensure recipients have access to all forms of produce – fresh, frozen and dried.
 - Support requiring USDA to consider GusNIP program grant applications/projects that promote or incentivize consumption of frozen produce, in addition to fresh, among SNAP recipients.
 - Support the inclusion of frozen produce items in the Produce Prescription Program. The program currently allows only fresh fruits and vegetables.
- ★ Support changing the DGA to include recommendations for fruit subtypes based on nutritional qualities such as bioactive properties.
- ★ Support efforts to strengthen and increase access to produce prescription programs.



Tax Policy

NABC supports targeted tax policies that strengthen the U.S. blueberry industry by fostering innovation, encouraging capital investment and sustaining domestic production. These policies are essential to ensuring the industry's global competitiveness, while supporting American farmers and rural economies.

Policy Positions

- ★ Support the Section 199A and 199A(g) tax deductions for farmers and farm cooperatives.
- ★ Support bonus depreciation – Bonus depreciation enables farmers to invest in equipment and infrastructure by allowing immediate deductions on qualified assets.
- ★ Support estate tax exemption and stepped-up basis – These provisions help farmers avoid excessive tax burdens when transferring land and equipment to heirs, preserving the economic viability of family-owned farms.
- ★ Support tax deductions for Multi-Peril Crop Insurance Premiums (MPCI).
- ★ Support new tax policies to address labor challenges, including tax credits or deductions to offset Agricultural Overtime requirements or H-2A application fees.
- ★ Support a new tax credit for investments in agriculture technology to help farmers innovate, improve productivity and stay competitive, while addressing challenges and meeting consumer demand for sustainable practices.
- ★ Support tax deductions for environmental agricultural practices, including organic certification, conservation, energy-efficient equipment, renewable energy systems and carbon credit programs.



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