

## Food, Ag Groups Ask Congress Not To Single Out Agriculture

WASHINGTON, D.C. — In a letter to the full House and Senate Budget Committees, nearly 100 food and agriculture groups urged that agriculture not be singled out for a disproportionate share of spending cuts as part of any bud-

get proposal.

Over the past 10 years, farm program spending has been reduced from \$25.8 billion to \$8.5 billion — a two-thirds reduction — and now accounts for only one percent of total federal spending,

the group pointed out. By contrast, total federal spending rose by 50 percent. If all other federal programs had taken the same level of cuts during that time, the U.S. would now be basking in a substantial budget surplus.

The groups told legislators how agriculture has played a major role in shaping America's economy. They noted that U.S. agriculture and food industries account for nearly 16 percent of the gross domestic product. In addition, U.S. consumers pay just eight percent of their disposable income on food — the lowest level in the world. Overseas, U.S. agricultural exports will account for more than \$48.5 billion this year. That translates into \$8 billion in federal tax revenues, an \$18 billion positive trade balance, and \$100 billion in economic activity.

The group also pointed out that unfairly targeting agriculture for disproportionate spending cuts could jeopardize its ability to compete in the global marketplace. Early hopes were that the most recent round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade would resolve trade disputes among the world's nations, they said. GATT made progress, but it did not eliminate all of the problems.

They explained that the Euro-

pean Union still maintains a three to one advantage over the U.S. in terms of its domestic support for agriculture and a six to one advantage in export subsidies. With nearly one out of six American jobs — a total of 21 million — attributable to agriculture, it is keenly important that the U.S. maintain a healthy agricultural industry, they indicated.

As required by the GATT agreement, the U.S. has already reduced its support for domestic farm programs by more than 20 percent. Further cuts would result in the U.S. unilaterally eliminating farm program protections, the groups told the budget committees. It would place our farmers at a gross disadvantage to their overseas counterparts.

In concluding the letter, the groups pointed out that farmers are not the only people who benefit from federal farm programs. Those who buy food, work in related industries, and wear clothes from home-grown materials all depend on a sound, healthy agricultural sector, the letter indicated.

## Maryland Earns Grant For Organic Farming

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — Maryland Secretary of Agriculture Lewis R. Riley has announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Federal State Marketing Improvement Program (FSMIP) has awarded the Maryland Department of Agriculture a grant to determine the feasibility of establishing a cooperative to market organically grown local produce.

"Our organic farming program is growing in Maryland. We now have some 45 officially certified organic growers in the state and

the number keeps growing. This grant will help us improve our efficiency in getting the organically grown local produce from the farmer to the consumer," Riley said.

The Maryland Department of Agriculture will match the grant, which is for \$49,812. The money will be used to sustain the growth of this new agriculture program, which the Maryland Department of Agriculture started in 1991 as the Maryland Organic Certification Program.

"The growth in the retail busi-

ness for organic producers in the last several years, shows that more and more people are interested in purchasing organically grown fresh fruits and vegetables. This grant will help to improve the marketing of these commodities," said Riley.

For more information on the Maryland Organic Certification Program and the FSMIP grant, contact the Maryland Department of Agriculture, Marketing Services, 50 Harry S. Truman Parkway, Annapolis, MD 21401, (410) 841-5770.

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## Orchard Tour June 20

KUTZTOWN (Berks Co.)—A twilight tour for small orchardists will be held on June 20 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. here at the Rodale Institute, according to Mena Hautau, extension agent, Berks County. The tour is sponsored by Berks County Cooperative Extension, Penn State, and the Rodale Institute (RI).

Topics to be presented include scab resistant cultivars, rotary hoe cultivation, and an update on mating disruption management.

Speakers include Dr. Carl Felland, Biglerville Fruit Research and Extension Center, Penn State; Sarah Wolfgang Heffner, orchard project manager, RI; Don Jantzi, research support staff, RI; Ike Kerschner, grower; Jeff Moyer, farm manager, RI; and Dr. Terry Schettini, associate director, RI.

For more information, contact Berks County Cooperative Extension, PO Box 520, Leesport, PA 19533-0520, (610) 378-1327, or the Rodale Institute, 611 Siegfriedale Rd., Kutztown, PA 19530, (610) 683-1454.

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