



## Will specialty crops hold the key to the 2007 Farm Bill?

By Sara Wyant, Editor, Agri-Pulse

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It's still a somewhat delicate coalition, but if the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance can stick together, many believe this 90-vote block could hold the key to passage of the 2007 Farm Bill. **"This Farm bill won't be adopted without some accommodation and fulfillment of the promises made to the specialty crops industry,"** emphasized Rep. Dennis Cardoza in an exclusive interview with A-P last week.

In the past two years, groups such as the United Fresh Produce Association, the Western Growers Association, the National Potato Council and the Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association have been honing their farm bill proposals and strategies. In March, Rep. Cardoza (D-CA), Adam Putman (R-FL), Rick Larsen (D-WA), Rep. John Salazar (D-CO.), Rep. Randy Kuhl (R-N.Y.), and Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) introduced the "Equitable Agriculture Today for a Healthy America Act" (EAT Healthy America Act). This bill would support specialty crop growers by increasing market access, encouraging and facilitating consumption of nutritious agricultural products, expanding funding for research programs and increasing opportunities for family farmers in conservation programs.

"Most of what we are asking for in the specialty crop segment is for dollars for farmers to comply, in the conservation title for example, with the regulatory environment imposed by states and the federal government on drainage, water, health and safety standards," explained Cardoza. "All of these things make it difficult to bring products to market."



Where will the additional dollars come from? Cardoza says he's still not sure. "The budget should have taken into account the money agriculture has saved, but leadership chose not to do that. They said there would be another way."

"There are a number of us who would not have voted for this budget if we would not have gotten additional money for agriculture," Cardoza emphasized. "All I can say is they better start working on it now. **The time for creative thinking has about run its course.**"

Still, Cardoza maintains that the budget, or lack thereof, should not preclude a great deal of cooperation as the Committee strives to write the 2007 Farm Bill. He gives a lot of credit to Chairman Peterson and his fellow subcommittee members for trying to work cooperatively through the process.

“It’s a very workable committee, but no one will get everything they want. We’re going to have to work through our challenges,” noted Cardoza. **“It will require the patience of Job.”**

At the same time, he’s keeping the specialty crop industry’s goals front and center.

“If anyone is thinking that we’ll allow agriculture to be pitted against each other, they are wrong,” he added. “We’ll bring down the whole farm bill if we need to make that point.”

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