

With the failure of the Super Committee process last fall, Congress will now have to work on the 2012 Farm Bill through regular order with hearings, committee mark-ups, and the floor amendment process. The current farm bill expires on September 30, 2012, and Congress must complete action on a new bill or pass an extension by then if it wants to avoid reverting to 1949 permanent law.

The Farm Bill impacts multiple sectors of our economy, not to mention everyone who eats. Delaying a Farm Bill creates unnecessary uncertainty for people who receive nutrition assistance, for farmers making production and planting decisions, and for food and farm businesses planning to grow, hire employees, and access new markets. It is imperative that Congress pass meaningful legislation this year because the longer the delay in passing a new Farm Bill, the fewer opportunities there will be for full funding for the bill. With a smaller pot of money programs that people in every state and district care about and benefit from end up competing against each other for funding.

The Farm Bill is a collection of legislative farm and food acts that come up for renewal roughly every 5 years--the last of which was enacted in 2008 and represented \$284 billion of the federal budget during that period. The Farm Bill sets priorities and provides funding for everything from crop subsidies, farmland preservation, international food aid and exports, nutrition entitlements, lending to farms, rural infrastructure investment, research, forest protection and restoration, energy promotion, organic agriculture, livestock, crop insurance, disaster assistance, and commodities trading. The expiring 2008 Farm Bill for the first time made a strong investment in specialty crops that benefit our central coast agriculture. The bill included provisions that would help specialty crop growers compete and grow in domestic and global markets.

It assisted specialty crop producers by expanding the USDA Fruit & Vegetable Snack Program, establishing a specialty crop research initiative to develop and disseminate science-based tools to address the needs of specialty crop producers, increasing funding for state-level specialty crop grants that focus on local, regional, and statewide programs to enhance producers' ability to compete in the marketplace and provide consumers with safe, abundant food, enhancing critical trade assistance and market promotion tools that will grow international markets for specialty crops, and investing in prevention and mitigation programs and tools to combat invasive pests and diseases, which cost the U.S. economy billions of dollars per year.

I will continue to work to keep the gains for specialty crop growers that were made in the last Farm Bill. We all can benefit from a robust bill that promotes and benefits our growers on the Central Coast that produce the vegetables, fruits, and nuts that make for a healthy diets.