

Trump's 2018 budget would cut Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

President Donald's Trump's proposed fiscal year 2018 budget would eliminate funding for USDA's Specialty Crop Block Grant Program.

A news release by the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance said the group is disappointed in the proposal to eliminate funding for that program and others that are important to the specialty crop industry.

The release said the proposals seem "to indicate a fundamental misunderstanding of what policies are needed to help specialty crop providers create their own success."

"The benefits far outweigh the costs of these programs," alliance representative Robert Guenther told Capital Press.

Guenther pointed out that the president's budget is just a "guidance document to Congress on how the administration would like to fund programs" and that



Andi Woolf-Weibye

the alliance enjoys wide support among members of Congress as well as state departments of agriculture.

"We're confident we have enough support for this program to combat the administration's proposal," he said. "We're confident we'll get the program fully funded."

The alliance is a national coalition of 120 organizations that represent growers of specialty crops, which include fruits, vegetables, dried fruit, tree nuts and nursery plants.

Guenther said alliance members will work with members of the administration to help them understand the value of the specialty crop block grant program.

Since 2008, USDA has provided \$461 million in specialty crop block grant funding to states, which have funded hun-

dreds of projects designed to improve the competitiveness of specialty crops.

USDA will provide \$60 million to states for their individual specialty crop block grant programs during fiscal 2017.

The amount individual states receive is based on a formula that includes how much specialty crop acreage that state has and the total farm cash receipts from that sector.

Western states fare well when it comes to the national rankings for funding.

California ranks No. 1 and will receive \$19.2 million this year, Washington ranks No. 2 with \$4.1 million, Idaho is No. 6 with \$1.76 million and Oregon is No. 7 at \$1.72 million.

The funding has been an important way for many farm groups, especially smaller ones, to fund research and marketing projects.

The Idaho Bean Commission, for example, has been able to fund numerous market expan-

sion and research projects with the help of the specialty crop block grant funding it has received through the Idaho State Department of Agriculture since 2009.

The commission has received more than \$100,000 in grants during five of the past eight years, while its overall budget is close to \$160,000.

"We couldn't do anywhere near the (number of) bean research and market expansion projects we do now without that funding," said IBC Administrator Andi Woolf-Weibye. "It allows us to do projects we otherwise wouldn't be able to do."

The national program functions in a way that allows each state to decide how best to spend the money to the benefit of its specialty crop industries, Guenther said.

For example, he said, a project that helps Idaho potato growers "may not be what Washington state potato growers need."

E. Idaho program gives urban students animal ag experience

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

POCATELLO, Idaho — Jack Garrett advises an urban FFA program at Highland High School.

In the past, raising large livestock for 4-H projects wasn't feasible for most of his students, aside from a few who made arrangements with relatives on working ranches.

This summer, however, barriers to experiencing animal agriculture will be removed for Garrett's students, thanks to a new partnership involving the high school, Bannock County 4-H and American Falls feedlot owner Kerry Ward.

Garrett said at least 10 of his students — mostly freshmen and sophomores — intend to participate in the county's new, collaborative bucket calf program. Ward will lend 4-week-old calves, which still require being fed buckets of milk, for the urban students to raise at the Bannock County Fairgrounds from June 12 through July 24. The county will host a special event for the students to show their calves, before they're returned to Ward about 150 pounds heavier.

The county and Ward will compensate the students for their labor, given that they'll miss out on the chance to sell their calves to local FFA supporters.

"I think we could probably get more (participants) as we get rolling on this project," Garrett said. "It doesn't matter about the money. They're just excited for the opportunity."

Nikki Dalton, University of Idaho Extension 4-H educator for Bannock County, has also opened the program to her 4-H students. Ward has had a similar arrangement for several years with the Blackfoot area's urban students, based at the Bingham County Fairgrounds. He said students within the



American Falls, Idaho, feedlot owner Kerry Ward discusses the bucket calf program he supports by lending calves from his feedlot.

Shoshone-Bannock Indian Reservation are also interested in working with him to start a program.

"I think it's a wonderful idea to expose families to the farm lifestyle," Ward said. "They learn the ups and downs we all go through to get food to the supermarket."

In addition to his own cattle, Ward custom feeds about 3,000 head for other feedlots that have maxed out their space. He admits it's a minor hassle turn over calves to the students' care, as

he often has to send staff members to Blackfoot or Pocatello to deliver feed. But he believes the opportunity to enlighten children who are becoming increasingly removed from food production is well worth the effort.

He said the students — who must tend to their animals early in the morning and late in the evening — develop an appreciation for hard work, and they generally take exceptional care of their calves. He recalls losing a single calf in all of his years of working with the program.

Dalton and Garrett will offer participants weekly lectures on animal nutrition, showmanship, grooming, health, safety, ethics, feeding and general care. Students will be asked to maintain a record book to document their efforts. Payment rates have not been set.

"Some (children) don't have the room to take care of large animals, but they want to have the experience of it, especially if they're interested in going into animal science or a career like that," Dalton said.

Jury rules with school in fight over California strawberries

By SCOTT SMITH
Associated Press

FRESNO, Calif. — A renowned strawberry researcher in California broke patent law and violated a loyalty pledge to his former university by taking his work with him to profit from it in a private company, a jury in San Francisco has decided.

Professor Douglas Shaw formed his own research firm with others after retiring from the University of California-Davis, where for years he had overseen the school's strawberry breeding program, developing a heartier and tastier fruit.

Jurors in the federal court decided that he used seeds developed at UC-Davis without gaining the university's permission.

The rift struck fear in some farmers in California, the No. 1 strawberry-growing state, that it would stymie research and cause them to lose their competitive edge. California last year produced 1.6 million tons of strawberries valued at roughly \$2 billion, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The university's strawberry breeding program is now under new leadership, providing farmers and consumers with new generations of the fruit, school officials said.

"This federal jury decision is good news for public strawberry breeders at UC-Davis and all strawberry farmers throughout California and the world," said Helene Dillard, dean of the UC-Davis College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences.

After reading the verdicts, Judge Vince Chhabria, who oversaw the trial, scolded both sides, expressing doubt about the sincerity they claimed to have for the strawberry industry.

"If you really care about strawberries, and if you really cared about California's Strawberry Breeding Program, you would figure out a way... to avoid subjecting them to this custody battle," he said.

Shaw had first sued UC-Davis after he retired, saying that the university unfairly destroyed some of his work and keeps some of his other research locked in a freezer, depriving the world of a better strawberry. He had sought \$45 million for lost research. The university countersued.

Shaw, 63, is a giant in the strawberry world, heading the university's breeding program for more than two decades alongside plant biologist Kirk Larson. Most of California's strawberry farmers grow plants developed by Shaw and Larson.

The two developed 24 new varieties, allowing growers to double the amount of strawberries produced while retaining the fruit's succulence. They created strawberries that were more pest- and disease-resistant, more durable during long-distance travel and capable of growing during the shorter days of spring and fall.

The partners say their work netted the university \$100 million in royalties. How much they themselves made at UC-Davis is unclear, but they say they contributed more than \$9 million of their own royalties toward the university's breeding program.

They retired from the university in 2014 because, they said, the school was winding down the program. Working in partnership with growers and nurseries, they launched a business called California Berry Cultivars, based in Watsonville, to develop strawberry varieties.

Attorney Sharyl Reisman, who represents the professors and California Berry Cultivars, said that despite the disappointing verdict, her clients wish to find a way to collaborate with the university.

Damages the professors owe in the case will be decided later, the judge said.

A.G. Kawamura, a strawberry farmer, former California agriculture secretary and part owner of the California Berry Cultivars, said the judge's comments signal a need for much more work to settle the dispute, even after the trial.

"We still believe there's good reason to hope for a collaborative progress for all parties to move our strawberry industry forward without litigation," Kawamura said.

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