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LARRY CRAIG

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Dan Whiting (202) 224-8078
Sid Smith (208) 342-7985

SENATE ADOPTS FARM BILL

Includes historic specialty crop programs

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Senate approved the Food and Energy Security Act of 2007 (H.R. 2419) with an overwhelming vote of 79-14. Idaho Senator Larry Craig supported the final bill, which included his robust specialty crop provisions as a subtitle in the bill. Inclusion of these provisions means over \$2 billion will be available through new or existing programs to assist and support specialty crop producers, plus an additional \$850 million will be available in disaster assistance. Idaho is among the leaders in production of a number of specialty crops, including potatoes, cherries, table grapes, apples, carrots, onions and seed crops.

"Congress is long overdue in recognizing the significance of the U.S. specialty crop industry by giving them a place in the farm bill," Craig said. "We're taking a major step forward in acknowledging the contribution of specialty crops both to the agricultural economy and to the health of all Americans. The specialty crop provisions I fought for in this bill will help our farmers meet the need for a stable, affordable, diverse, and secure supply of food, produced right here at home."

The specialty crop subtitle largely mirrors language introduced by Senator Craig and Senator Stabenow, D-Mich., earlier this year in S.1160, the Specialty Crop Competition Act of 2007. It was cosponsored by Senator Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, among others, and was supported by a broad coalition of over 120 specialty crop organizations representing 350 different specialty crops.

Several provisions will directly benefit Idaho consumers and producers of specialty crops:

- School Snack Program - Increases funding for the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program which makes fresh fruits and vegetables freely available in schools nationwide. The program is designed to increase children's consumption of fruits and vegetables to improve overall health and reduce the risk of obesity.
- Specialty Crop Research - Establishes a specialty crop priority-focused grant program, awarding grants to eligible public and private entities to improve the efficiency and competitiveness of U.S. specialty crop producers.
- Pests and Disease Programs - Establishes programs to protect the domestic specialty crop industry by preventing or eradicating pest and disease threats in the United States, such as Potato Cyst Nematode.
- Block Grants - Expands the State Block Grants for Specialty Crops program, which helped launch the "Idaho Preferred" certification mark for Idaho products and funded University of Idaho research on specialty and alternative fruit crops in Idaho, including table grapes.
- Trade Assistance - Increases funding for programs to boost U.S. specialty crop exports by facilitating the removal of specialty crop trade barriers abroad.

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Craig was also pleased that the bill included language that will help address unique needs of the livestock industry, including: veterinarian shortages in rural areas, veterinary drug research for minor species including sheep, an aquaculture-specific disease monitoring program, brucellosis control, and bighorn/domestic sheep research.

Craig was able to offer his amendment to protect the private property rights of farmers and ranchers, who, as the saying goes, are land rich, cash poor. While his amendment failed, as did all other amendments offered to the bill, Craig offered the following thoughts, "Farmers and ranchers have been some of the most vulnerable citizens to abuses of eminent domain powers following the Supreme Court's 2005 *Kelo* ruling. That is why I led the charge, along with Senators Brownback, R-Kan., and Allard, R-Colo., to elevate private property rights protection for farmers and ranchers. My goal was to raise the awareness of this issue and to put Senators on record on this basic, fundamental right. I was particularly pleased that Senator Leahy, D-Vt., Chairman of the Judiciary Committee, agreed to hold hearings on this issue as a result of our efforts."

More details about each amendment and other actions on the farm bill are available on Senator Craig's Farm Bill Floor Journal at http://craig.senate.gov/journal_ag.cfm.