

GROWERTALKS

SAF in the Lobby

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SAF Suggests Improvements to Floriculture Crops Summary

The Society of American Florists

Coming on the heels of a successful lobbying effort to fund the 2018 Floriculture Crops Summary, SAF has asked that the report be expanded to include more states to capture the breadth and scope of the floral industry.

In a letter sent to the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), SAF noted that the Floriculture Crops Summary has been a vital tool for the industry dating back to 1956. Retailers and wholesalers have relied on it to help identify trends. Growers consider the report a benchmark of industry health and an important tool, using it to help determine values and assisting them in determining what to plant and in what quantities.

In late 2015, NASS informed SAF that budgetary limitations would prevent the agency from performing the floriculture survey in 2016 and 2017. Due to the importance of the survey, the decision by USDA was met with broad concern throughout the industry. Floriculture and nursery products contribute 15% of the value of U.S. crop agriculture, and SAF believes the data on such an important sector of the economy should continue to be collected and published. For those reasons, SAF led a successful lobbying campaign this year to push for funds to produce the 2018 summary.

The letter acknowledged constraints the agency faces in completing the survey and noted that some suggestions might not be feasible at the moment. But in the spirit of working with NASS to develop the most accurate and useful survey possible, SAF made the following suggestions:

- **Size of the survey**—SAF requested that NASS consider expanding the survey to include more than the 15 states that have been surveyed in the most recent reports. For many years, growers in 28 states were included in the survey. Later, but prior to 2006, the survey included growers in 36 states. By reducing the states to 15, a significant portion of the industry is left unaccounted for, significantly reducing the accuracy of the data. This is particularly true for bedding/garden plants, the industry's largest sector by value. Furthermore, there are large geographic gaps with no New England states included and only California, Oregon, Texas and Washington west of the Mississippi River.

Because of the nature of the industry, certain geographic areas contain a large percentage of specific crops and the manner in which they're counted can skew the survey results. For example, cut flowers are concentrated in California, and foliage and cut greens are concentrated in Florida. However, in the 2014 survey, only 57 tulip growers (in 2013) were included among the data, whereas the 2014 Census of Horticultural Specialties listed 397 potted tulip producers and 262 cut tulip growers in the 50 states. Similarly, bedding/garden plant production occurs across the country.

For these reasons SAF encouraged NASS to consider returning the survey to 36 states, if possible, or some other number that would best capture the breadth of the industry without over-extending the agency's resources.

In addition, SAF noted that future surveys will likely include Alaska. SAF said that was a positive development, particularly as it related to peony production. However, SAF asked that, at minimum, the survey be expanded to include 16 states (including Alaska) so as not to further erode the value of the 15-state survey.

- **Floriculture products**—SAF also told NASS it supported the list of floriculture crops currently being surveyed. However, SAF asked the agency to evaluate and confirm there's consistency in crops surveyed with the most recent Census of Horticultural Specialties. SAF noted there may have been some shifts in crop preferences since the last survey was conducted, such as hydrangeas both as potted plants and cut flowers.

SAF closed the letter by thanking NASS for conducting the 2018 Floriculture Crops Summary and expressed a desire to work closely with NASS to promote survey participation in the months.

SAF Weighs in on the Proper Regulation of Pesticides

In response to a recent decision handed down from the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit to ban the pesticide chlorpyrifos, SAF joined other agricultural organizations in calling for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to petition the court to reconsider the decision.

Chlorpyrifos is used on 50 crops in 45 states and has played a key role in pest management efforts in the U.S. for over 50 years. Growers face limited or no viable alternatives to chlorpyrifos when an outbreak of a new pest occurs and have relied on chlorpyrifos as a proven first line of defense.

The letter noted that the only legal avenue for EPA to "modify or revoke a tolerance" is to undertake a specific administrative process and that the process hasn't been completed. It stressed that the Court cannot substitute its judgment for EPA and tell EPA the scientific conclusion it must reach.

It also pointed out that EPA's 2017 order that denied an administrative petition to revoke tolerances expressed confidence that the current regulatory standard is protective of human health. The current EPA safety standard for chlorpyrifos is based on 50 years of its use, health surveillance of manufacturing workers and applicators, and over 4,000 studies and reports that have examined the impacts of the product on health, safety and the environment.

The letter stressed that the banning of chlorpyrifos through judicial action threatens the science-based analysis and other steps that EPA must take under law and would force EPA to violate the longstanding procedural safeguards and other requirements provided by Congress.

In another letter sent to Congress, SAF joined other agricultural organizations expressing its support provisions in the House-passed Farm Bill that would improve the regulations of pesticides.

The letter noted that the reforms would create a regulatory system based on science, balances risks and benefits, and provides certainty that allows technology providers to continue investments in innovation to meet the need for modern pest control tools while also protecting human health and the environment. **GT**