ASHS FACT SHEET – The Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI)

**Background:** The SCRI is a federal grant program managed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) that helps support research and extension for specialty crops, which are currently defined in the Farm Bill as “Fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops (including floriculture).” These crops are critically important for a myriad of reasons ranging from economics to health to sustainability and impact on rural communities. However, the diversity of specialty crops and ever-changing growing conditions have led to a long list of unmet research needs in the SCRI program.

Sustaining all components of food and agriculture, including conventional and organic food production systems, is a key challenge at the national, regional, and multi-state levels. To meet the challenge, project areas for the SCRI include plant breeding methods to improve crop characteristics, identifying/addressing pest and disease threats, improved efficiency, productivity and profitability, technology innovations, and prevention/management of potential food safety hazards in specialty crops.

While SCRI has not been fully funded, it has successfully launched many research projects that have begun to meet the challenges of vital and diverse commodities and this is leading to exciting progress in breeding, robotics, and sustainable production and pest management. Direct synergistic relationships between farmers, researchers and Cooperative Extension have been a feature of the program that continues to lead to measurable impacts.

**Problem:** Specialty crops constitute half of all crop value in the United States and are central to the nutrition and well-being of Americans. They provide regional economic development as a high-value enterprise for rural communities and yet the SCRI program consistently has far more worthy proposals submitted than can be funded. Also, past matching requirements have proven to be an ineffective and detrimental burden to the effective and efficient operation of this program and are unnecessary.

**Action Needed:** Congress should increase the funding for the SCRI program to the specialty crop industry’s recommendation to reauthorize this program at $130 million a year. Additionally, any consideration of matching requirements should include workable flexibility measures.