

# Reflections

## The American Society for Horticultural Science Visits Capitol Hill for Farm Bill

**Essie Fallahi, ASHS President**

Before I start my main article, I wish to extend my heartfelt congratulations and well wishes to all ASHS members and non-members of Persian decent from all around the globe, particularly Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India, Pakistan, and Turkey for the occasion of Nowruz festival and celebration. Nowruz is a millennia-old ancient tradition of people with Persian/ Iranian origin who celebrate the renewal of nature with the beginning of spring. Together with this amazing tradition, all citizens of Earth are supposed to open their arms for friendship and cleansing of their hearts from any animosity, impurity, lies, and evil thought. For this occasion, I am attaching a photo of Fallahi's family *Haftseen* of year 1402 (2023) to all our fellow horticulturists, with the hope of freedom, justice, and equality for all mankind throughout the world. Happy Nowruz to all horticulturists, including ASHS' own Negar Mahdavian.



**Haftseen Table of Nowruz celebration, March 20, 2023. The items on the ancient Haftseen Table, mostly represent horticultural products, including Apple, Sumac, Hyacinth, Garlic, Vinegar/wine, Wheat/lentil sprouts, Almonds, Pistachio, Walnuts.**

The US Farm Bill is a package of legislation passed roughly once every five years. The Farm Bill covers programs ranging from healthy food availability to low-income families to crop insurance, from beginning farmer training to support for sustainable farming practices, and more. The legislation in this bill is a leading advocate for family farmers, consumers, and for the natural environment.

In 1930s, President Roosevelt enacted the Farm Bill for the first time to ensure sufficient food supply and to keep food prices fair for farmers and consumers. Although details in the Farm Bill changes over time, depending on the needs and realities of farming, technology, environments etc., the general goals of the bill remain the same over the years.

Usually, the Farm Bill gets evaluated and renewed every 5 years and the bill has 12 chapters, or titles, including: Title 1: Commodities; Title 2: Conservation; Title 3: Trade; Title 4: Nutrition; Title 5: Credit; Title 6: Rural Development; Title 7: Research, Extension, and Related Matters; Title 8: Forestry; Title 9: Energy; Title 10: Horticulture; Title 11: Crop Insurance; Title 12: Miscellaneous. The Farm Bill is drafted by the Senate and House Committee members on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

The 2018 Farm Bill was projected to cost about \$428 billion over the 5 years of the bill's life, according to the estimates from the Congressional Budget Office.

As mentioned in a previous column, ASHS leadership has been active in advocating for the approval of the Farm Bill from the times that Specialty Crops were added to the bill.

Most of us are dependent to some extent on federal funding to do our work. That money is available because of advocacy with Congress that these funds should be spent on horticultural research and extension rather than on other budget priorities. If we, the practitioners of research and extension, are not actively and continuously describing the needs and the benefits to these fiscal decisionmakers, the money will go to something else. Therefore, I consider it the responsibility of everyone uses federal money to be a participant in this process.

Thanks to the efforts of several colleagues and ASHS leadership, we had an exceptionally successful and productive visit to Washington DC between February 28 and March 2, 2023, for advocating the renewal of the Farm Bill in 2023. During this visit, in parallel with the ASHS Leadership Fellows' Hill visit, a satellite team renewed relationships on the Hill on Tuesday and Wednesday. This group was made up of ASHS President Essie Fallahi, ASHS Past President Louise Ferguson, ASHS National Issues Committee members Bhimu Patil and Thomas Björkman, and ASHS Executive Director, Mike Neff.

We were able to learn precisely where Congress is in developing the Farm Bill. The Senate Agriculture Committee was preparing the base language and collecting input from each senator. We were able to meet the agriculture committee staff, who are responsible for the actual writing of the bill. We discussed issues surrounding the Specialty Crops Research Initiative and the Specialty Crop Block Grants. ASHS is the sole professional

society advocating for these two programs, though we do so in concert with many industry organizations. The staffers know that neither of these programs is controversial, but that they compete for continued or increased funding with many other programs. Making these programs priority for dollars requires having many senators ask for the higher level of funding. That is what we set out to do. Thankfully, committee chair Debbie Stabenow has been a powerful advocate of both programs. However, she needs support from many senators to get the full ask in the final bill. We then met with the agriculture staffer for Agriculture Committee member Gillibrand of New York to ask that this be a priority in the New York request. Thereafter we met with staffers from both Idaho Senators Crapo and Risch, who were very receptive on learning the importance of these programs for Idaho and appreciated the information we could provide.

Then we moved to the House side, starting with committee staff who put together the final bill. The House Agriculture Committee anticipates doing hearings over the next several months to assess the efficacy of current Farm Bill programs, after which they will begin writing their version of the Farm Bill. We described how valuable these two programs on specialty crops, and several others of importance to ASHS members, have been. We asked about how best to get that information included in the Committee's deliberations. Testimony at the field hearings was considered very important. While no hearing had been scheduled for either the Research Title (SCRI) or the Horticulture Title (SCBG), we were urged to stay in touch to find out when those would happen. We then met with the agriculture assistants for several members of the House Agriculture Committee, Ronny Jackson and de la Cruz of Texas, Nick Langworthy and Claudia Tenney of New York, to describe how these programs are valuable for their respective districts. We encouraged them to be supportive. Some representatives were holding field hearings in the district, and we were encouraged to attend and comment there along with stakeholders.

The following pictures were taken during our visit of the Capitol hill in February and March 2023.















REPRESENTATIVE  
Nicholas A. Langworthy  
New York  
1630

YES! WE'RE  
OPEN



REPRESENTATIVE  
Nicholas A. Langworthy  
New York  
1630

YES! WE'RE  
OPEN

