

Washington, DC -- Congressman Vern Buchanan (R-FL 13) voted today in support of Florida farmers, helping to pass the “Farm Bill Extension Act” (H.R. 2419). The farm bill is a five-year overhaul of agriculture policy that includes critical investments in Florida agriculture products, imposes modest limits on farm subsidies, bolsters land conservation efforts, and increases funding for nutrition programs.

“Our district is the third-largest agricultural producer in the entire state of Florida,” Buchanan said. “Our district is the number one producer of vegetables and melons -- and we’re number two in citrus and cattle. The last farm bill in 2002 did nothing to support specialty crops such as fruits and vegetables – which are grown right here in Hardee, Desoto, Manatee, and Sarasota counties. This farm bill includes important investments in these home-grown products.”

The legislation includes \$1.7 billion over five years for specialty crops, which primarily means fruits and vegetables. The specialty-crop spending approximately quadruples what the last farm bill offered in 2002.

“This bill is critically important to our farmers,” said Buchanan. “That’s why it’s strongly supported by the Florida Farm Bureau, Florida Department of Agriculture, Florida Citrus Mutual, Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association, Sarasota Farm Bureau, Manatee Farm Bureau, Desoto Farm Bureau, Hardee Farm Bureau, Charlotte Farm Bureau, and the Florida Council of Cooperatives.”

Florida, the second-largest state producing specialty crops, could receive more than \$10 million a year under the program. Local agriculture representatives said they see the bill as a means of getting more recognition for the Florida specialty crop industry.

“Florida farmers work hard to produce our domestic food supply, pay their taxes, and represent an important part of our economy,” added Buchanan. “They need and deserve our support.”

The measure also makes overdue reforms to U.S. farm policy. The bill would ban subsidies to farmers whose income averages more than \$1 million a year – the current limit is \$2.5 million. It also would stop farmers from collecting payments for multiple farm businesses.

Florida farmers had high praise for Buchanan.

“He put the best interest of his constituents ahead of party politics – he did the right thing,” said Sarasota County Farm Bureau President Rory Martin. “This was a courageous vote and we appreciate his support for area farmers.”

“This is a history-making bill for our industry. It’s the first time a Farm Bill has addressed the needs and priorities of those who grow our country’s fruits and vegetables,” said Mike Stuart, president of the Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association.

Michael W. Sparks, executive vice president/CEO of Florida Citrus Mutual, said “The funding boost this Farm Bill will give citrus greening research programs offers hope that we can unearth a scientific solution to the insidious disease which is threatening the very foundation of our \$9 billion industry. Research is already in the pipeline and it is essential that it continues unabated”.