



2025 Legislative Priorities

usapple.org



About USApple

We represent the United States' 27,000 apple growers, nearly 40 state and regional apple associations, and almost 4,000 apple-related companies. Our members collectively grow more than 11 billion pounds of apples a year on average, supporting 150,000 jobs and generating more than \$9 billion in total wages and \$23 billion in economic output.

150,000

Jobs

27,000

Apple Growers

4,000

Apple-Related
Companies

\$23B

Economic
Output

11B

Pounds A Year
On Average

\$9B

Total Wages

40

State & Regional
Apple Associations

MISSION

USApple's mission is to advocate for American apple growers and their industry partners on national issues in order to promote the profitable production and marketing of apples and apple products. By unifying a diverse industry, we serve three primary goals:

- Represent the industry on national issues.
- Work with regulators, legislators and the Administration to move the goals of the industry forward.
- Provide helpful information on matters pertaining to the industry—providing detailed data analysis, serving as a media contact, and managing crisis communications.

MEMBERSHIP

USApple's members include the following state apple associations, representing apple growers throughout the country, as well as regional apple associations and individual firms involved in the apple business.

- California Apple Commission
- Colorado Apple Admin. Committee
- Connecticut Apple Marketing Board
- Georgia Fruit Growers
- Idaho Apple Commission
- Illinois State Horticultural Society
- Indiana Horticultural Society
- Maine Apple Marketing Committee
- Maryland Apple Promotion Board
- Massachusetts Fruit Growers Assoc.
- Michigan Apple Committee
- Minnesota Apple Growers Assoc.
- Missouri State Horticultural Society
- New England Apple Association
- New Hampshire Fruit Growers Assoc.
- New Jersey Apple Industry Council
- New Mexico Apple Commission
- New York Apple Association
- North Carolina Apple Growers Assoc.
- Ohio Apple Marketing Program
- Oregon – Hood River Grower-Shipper Assoc.
- Pennsylvania Apple Program
- Utah Apple Marketing Board
- Vermont Tree Fruit Growers Assoc.
- Virginia Apple Growers Assoc.
- Washington Apple Commission
- West Virginia Horticultural Society
- Wisconsin Apple Growers Assoc.

Agriculture Labor Reform

Apple growing, harvesting, and packing are highly labor-intensive. There is no longer an adequate domestic workforce to fill these jobs and, as a result, most apple growers have turned to the H-2A agricultural guestworker program. Those growers who still rely on domestic workers face unpredictability and frequent labor shortages. Apple packers and processors do not qualify for the H-2A program, putting them in additional peril.

The H-2A program is complicated and administratively burdensome, but the need for labor is so great that the number of H-2A workers has quadrupled in the past 10 years. That trend continues, much of it being driven by the apple industry. The past several years have seen an onslaught of new regulations, adding increased complexity and expense to the program.

In addition to these regulatory burdens, the cost of the H-2A program has become untenable. The Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR) continues to outpace that of the general marketplace, in some years increasing by as much as 10 percent. Growers must also absorb increased input costs while the prices they receive have remained stagnant or even decreased. During the fall harvest season of 2024, many growers reported that they left apples on the trees because they could not afford to pick them.

This is not sustainable. The bipartisan Supporting Farm Operations Act of 2025 (H.R.1624) would provide some relief by pausing increases to the AEWR for two years and rolling back some of the onerous regulations imposed over the past few years. While permanent reforms would still be needed, this pause would provide a lifeline to growers and potentially save multi-generation family operations from going out of business.

Every farm worker engaged in high-value, labor-intensive crop production sustains three or more local, off-farm (but agricultural dependent), year-round jobs. If growers lose access to the H-2A program due to administrative burdens or cost, it will have the same economic impact on these communities as factories closed and shipped overseas.

A stable, legal and reliable workforce is critical if the U.S. is to have a vibrant domestic apple industry. Mandatory E-Verify without broader reforms would

have a devastating effect on the industry. Therefore, passing legislative reforms that address both the current and future flow of workers is the industry's top priority.



USApple Position:

USApple urges Congress to pass legislation that provides meaningful agricultural labor reform and meets the following objectives:

1. Provides a stable, adequate and predictable supply of agricultural labor capable of participating legally in the U.S. workforce;
2. Significantly reforms the H-2A program; and
3. Addresses the unsustainable escalation of mandated guest worker wage rates, and removes unreasonable employer sanctions and regulatory burdens.

Crop Protection

USApple supports a strong, science-based, regulatory approach to crop protection chemical registration.

Apple growers have adopted programs such as Integrated Pest Management, Integrated Resistance Management, and other mechanisms to minimize the use of pesticides. However, with more than 100 species of insects and diseases that threaten apples, the continued availability of effective and affordable agricultural chemicals is critical to the success of the industry.

Continued funding for the following programs is needed to produce reliable data and support that helps to ensure pesticide availability for apple growers:

- National Agricultural Statistics Service chemical use surveys. These surveys provide vital information for registered crop protection chemicals and their environmental evaluation.

- Pesticide Data Program (PDP) administered by the Agricultural Marketing Service.
- Office of Pest Management Policy within the USDA Office of the Chief Economist.
- IR-4 (minor-use registration of crop protection tools), administered by the National Institute for Food and Agriculture. Without IR-4, apple growers would have fewer crop protection compounds. IR-4 scientists generate the data necessary for the registration of compounds for use on apples and other minor/specialty crops.

USApple Position:

USApple urges full funding for the above programs to ensure adequate data and support for science-based pesticide registration decisions for the apple industry.

Research

Research and extension activities supported by the Agriculture Department play a critical role in the health and future viability of the apple industry. USDA works collaboratively with researchers at land grant universities to fight invasive pests and diseases, implement improved pest management strategies, and develop science-based food safety initiatives.

- **The Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI)**

The critical value of the SCRI is illustrated by two of the many important research efforts – controlling the Spotted Lanternfly and the Brown Marmorated Stink Bug. These have prevented the loss of tens of millions of dollars worth of domestic apples. Specific projects with multi-state impact include development of new Integrated Pest Management practices to enhance workplace safety and increase efficiencies (CA, MI, OR, UT, WA), and application of modern genomics and genetic technologies to create new apple varieties (AR, CA, FL, MI, MN, NY, TX, SC, WA). SCRI grants are also used to advance food safety as well as mechanization and automation.

- **Geneva Apple Rootstock Breeding Program**

Consumers and growers nationwide benefit greatly from improved disease resistance and increased productivity provided by new rootstock varieties. Research is being conducted in CA, ID, ME, MA, MD, MI, NC, NJ, NY, OH, OR, PA, UT, VA, WV and WA.

- **The National Clean Plant Network (NCPN)**

The biosafety of our nation's plant material is crucial, and the NCPN protects U.S. specialty crops, including apples, from the spread of plant pests and diseases. The tree fruit industry relies heavily on the NCPN as the single nationally-certified source of plant material that is free of devastating diseases.

USApple Position:

USApple urges Congress to fully fund these vital USDA research programs and support the researchers who conduct this important work.



Farm Bill

The U.S. apple industry believes federal agricultural policy should encourage competitiveness through private investment, opportunities to increase profitability in the marketplace and incentives for growers who are committed to better serving consumer needs.

USApple is a founding member of the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance (SCFBA). The SCFBA successfully advocated for specialty crop programs in the 2008, 2014 and 2018 Farm Bills and is now working to build on those accomplishments in the next Farm Bill. USApple and the SCFBA oppose any attempt to expand the definition of specialty crops beyond that established in the Specialty Crop Competitiveness Act of 2004.

USApple strongly supports maintaining and expanding key Farm Bill programs including:

- The Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI) – Used to combat pests and disease, develop new rootstocks, and develop automation technology.
- International Trade – The Market Access Program and the Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops.
- Specialty Crop Block Grants – Targeted to local needs and can be used on a variety of priorities, including research, marketing, food safety and nutrition initiatives.
- Crop Insurance – Traditional, whole farm and the Tree Assistance Program provide a critical lifeline for the industry as extreme weather events are becoming common place.
- Nutrition – The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program has proven successful in increasing consumption of fresh produce by elementary school students in low-income schools. Commodity purchase programs should be improved, and incentive programs expanded.
- Buy American – Congress should strengthen and require USDA to enforce the Buy American requirements in USDA school meals programs.
- The National Clean Plant Network (NCPN) – Establishes a network of clean plant centers to ensure nurseries can continue to provide safe, virus-free plant materials for orchards.

USApple Position:

USApple urges Congress to maintain and improve specialty crop programs in the next Farm Bill.

International Trade

The total U.S. apple crop size exceeds domestic consumption, so exports are critical to maintaining a balance of supply and demand and improving grower returns.

Historically, nearly one-third of the apple crop had been destined for export with a value of about \$1 billion annually.

IMPORTANCE OF NORTH AMERICAN MARKET

The United States, Canada and Mexico combine to make up one of the most competitive and successful regional economic platforms in the world. Mexico is our #1 export market and Canada is #2.

In 2023-24 the U.S. exported 17.3 million bushels to Mexico and 7.4 million bushels to Canada with a combined value of \$550.7 million. USApple strongly supported and advocated for passage of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA).

MARKET-OPENING TRADE NEGOTIATIONS

The future of the U.S. apple industry will be determined in large part by improved access to foreign markets.

Negotiations and future trade deals must consider non-tariff trade barriers, which the industry faces in many markets. This is particularly true in Japan, the EU and the UK, all of which would be natural destinations for U.S. apples if not for these non-tariff barriers.

MONITORING EU REQUEST FOR EXPANDED ACCESS TO U.S. MARKET

EU officials have consistently prioritized expedited access to the U.S. market for their apples and pears. USApple has raised science-based concerns with this request, particularly the inclusion of Poland in the EU request. Unlike the other EU countries, Poland does not currently have access to the U.S. market because it has not conducted a comprehensive and formal pest risk assessment. USApple has conveyed these

scientific concerns to the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service since 2016 but has never received satisfactory responses.

Adding to our concerns, the EU is not a reciprocal market. U.S. apples have extremely limited access to the market due to the EU's exclusionary pesticide policies which are not grounded in science. For U.S. producers, the bottom line is this: if we don't have access to their market, they should not be given expedited access to ours.

USApple Position:

USApple urges fair trade policies so that U.S. growers have equal access to foreign markets before the U.S. grants access to our markets.

USApple supports a science-based system for decisions regarding the importation of apples into the U.S. as the best defense against foreign pests or diseases entering the country and jeopardizing U.S. apple production.

USDA MARKET ACCESS PROGRAM

In FY 2024, the apple industry received more than \$6 million in export market development funds from the USDA's Market Access Program (MAP). These funds are matched by grower dollars to promote U.S. apples in more than 25 countries. Funding for MAP has not increased in nearly twenty years. In that time, fully one-third of MAP funding has been lost to sequestration, inflation, and program administration. The bipartisan Agricultural Export Promotion Act of 2025 would double MAP funding.

USApple Position:

USApple urges Congress to pass H.R. 1086 the Agricultural Export Promotion Act of 2025.

CONTACT US

For more information about USApple and our activities on behalf of America's apple industry, please contact Diane Kurrle, Senior Vice President, dkurrle@usapple.org or visit us at [USApple.org](https://usapple.org). Follow us @usapples.



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