



2026 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 industry partners on national issues 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 policy issues.
- Engage with regulators, legislators and the Administration to advance industry priorities.
- Provide timely information and expertise on industry matters – including data analysis, media relations, and 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 businesses involved in the apple value chain.

- 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.

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. Follow us @usapples.



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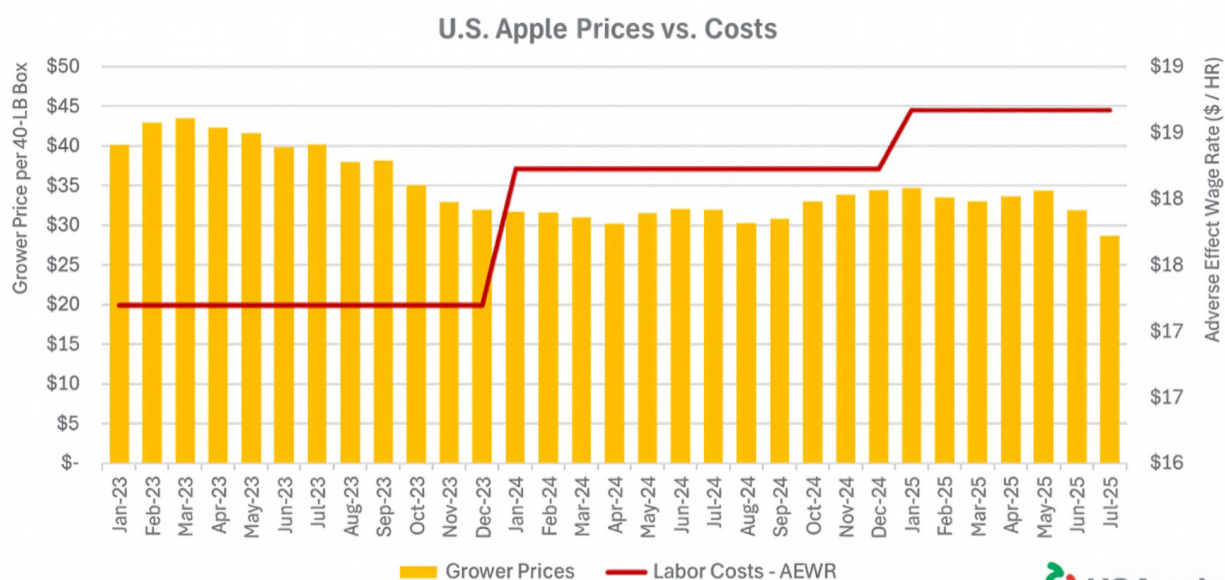
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 U.S. Apple Association

Agriculture Labor Reform

Apple production—from growing to harvesting and packing—is highly labor-intensive, and there is no longer a sufficient domestic workforce to meet these needs. As a result, most growers rely on the H-2A agricultural guestworker program, while those who depend on domestic labor face chronic shortages. Apple packers and processors do not qualify for H-2A, placing them at additional risk.

The H-2A program is complex and costly, but the need for labor is so great that the number of

H-2A workers has quadrupled over the past decade. Program costs, driven by increases to the Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR), have outpaced both inflation and broader wage trends, rising by as much as 10 percent in some years. At the same time, growers face higher input costs while the prices they receive for their crop have remained flat or declined, leaving many operating at a loss. Some growers report leaving fruit on the trees because they could not afford to pick it.



Sources: USDOL, ETA & BLS; USApple



In October, the Department of Labor published an Interim Final Rule establishing a new wage methodology for determining the AEWR. USApple strongly supports this action because it provides a wage floor that better reflects the marketplace and allows employers to compensate workers based on experience and skill. While the new wage methodology is very helpful, it is subject to change by a future administration. In addition, other H-2A reforms are needed, such as eliminating the use of state prevailing wage surveys and streamlining of the program. Examples of these reforms can be found in the final report of the bi-partisan House Agricultural Labor Working Group.

A stable, legal and reliable workforce is essential to sustaining a vibrant domestic apple industry. 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 their seasonal workforce or can no longer afford them, the economic impact on these communities would be comparable to factories closing and moving overseas.

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 agricultural workforce authorized to work legally in the U.S.;
2. Significantly reforms and modernizes the H-2A program; and
3. Addresses the unsustainable escalation of mandated guest-worker wage rates and reduces 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 USDA play a critical role in the health and long-term viability of the apple industry. Through collaboration with researchers at land grant universities, USDA helps combat invasive pests and diseases, advance pest management strategies, and develop science-based food safety initiatives.

- **The Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI)**
SCRI plays a critical role in the apple industry by supporting research that addresses major threats such as the Spotted Lanternfly and Brown Marmorated Stink Bug, preventing tens of millions of dollars in potential losses to U.S. apple production. Specific multi-state projects include developing new Integrated Pest Management practices to enhance workplace safety and improve efficiency (CA, MI, OR, UT, WA), as well as applying modern genomics and genetic technologies to create new apple varieties with consumer-preferred traits (AR, CA, FL, MI, MN, NY, TX, SC, WA). SCRI grants also advance food safety, mechanization, and automation.

- **USDA-Geneva Apple Rootstock Breeding Program**

Growers nationwide benefit from rootstock varieties that provide improved disease resistance, climate resilience, and increased productivity. Research is being conducted across CA, ID, ME, MA, MD, MI, NC, NJ, NY, OH, OR, PA, UT, VA, WV and WA.

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

Healthy plant material is essential to the success of U.S. specialty crops. The NCPN protects apples from the spread of pests and diseases, serving as the single nationally-certified source of plant material that is free of 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

America's apple growers rely on a strong Farm Bill to remain competitive, manage risk, and meet consumer demand. As a founding member of the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance, USApple has worked with Congress to secure and strengthen critical programs for specialty crops since 2008, ensuring growers have the research, market development, and risk-management tools needed to sustain production.

The One Big Beautiful Bill Act, signed into law in July of 2025, increased funding for key Farm Bill programs including the Specialty Crop Research Initiative, Specialty Crop Block Grant Program and Market Access Program. A new Farm Bill is still needed to provide policy direction and ensure this funding is implemented as intended.

The Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026, introduced by House Agriculture Committee Chairman GT Thompson, provides that direction. Importantly, it also establishes a framework for USDA to deliver economic and disaster assistance tailored to specialty crop producers. Key USApple Farm Bill priorities include:

- The Specialty Crop Research Initiative – Used to combat pests and diseases, 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.
- Clean Plant Network – 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 including:

- Establishing a framework for economic and disaster assistance.
- Affirming the definition of specialty crops in the 2004 Competitiveness Act be used in all USDA programs.

International Trade

The U.S. apple crop consistently exceeds domestic consumption, making exports critical to balancing supply and demand and supporting grower returns.

Nearly 25% of the fresh apple crop is exported, with a value exceeding \$1 billion annually.

IMPORTANCE OF NORTH AMERICAN MARKET

Mexico is the top export market for U.S. apples, followed by Canada. USAApple strongly supported passage of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), and renewal of USMCA is our top trade priority.

In 2025, the U.S. exported 16.3 million bushels to Mexico and 7.7 million bushels to Canada with a combined value of \$549 million.

MARKET-OPENING TRADE NEGOTIATIONS

The long-term viability of the U.S. apple industry depends on maintaining and expanding export markets.

In addition to tariff reductions, future trade negotiations must also address non-tariff trade barriers that limit access in many markets. This is particularly evident in Japan, the EU and the UK, which would otherwise represent strong destinations for U.S. apples.

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

EU officials have consistently sought expedited access to the U.S. market for their apples and pears. USAApple has raised science-based concerns with this request, particularly regarding the inclusion of Poland, which does not currently have access to the U.S. market because a comprehensive pest risk assessment has not been completed. USAApple has conveyed these concerns to USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection

Service since 2016 without a satisfactory response.

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



USAApple Position:

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

USAApple supports a science-based system for decisions regarding apple imports as the best safeguard against the introduction of foreign pests and diseases that could threaten U.S. production.

CONTACT US

For more information about USAApple 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. Follow us @usapples.



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