

# **AG ISSUES UPDATE**

**Edited by Sara Hricko**

**May 2025**

## ***USApple Updates***

### **USApple Engages Top Trade and Labor Officials in D.C.**

This week, USApple conducted a high-level day of advocacy in Washington, D.C., meeting with Trump Administration officials at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), and the White House Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR).

These meetings were strengthened by the leadership of USApple Officers Steve Smith (Vice President of Washington Fruit Growers; Yakima, WA) and Philip Glaize, III (Head of Operations for Glaize Apples; Winchester, VA), who traveled to D.C. on short notice to advocate on behalf of the apple industry.

Meetings were held with Trump Administration senior advisors for:

- Trade
- Labor
- Food safety
- Marketing & regulatory programs, including phytosanitary trade issues and AMS apple purchases
- Research and economics, including the Farm Labor Survey used to calculate the AEW

#### Key Issues Discussed

##### Trade:

- Urged USTR to prioritize elimination of India's 50% tariffs on U.S. apples
- Shared industry data supporting tariff relief and market access in countries such as Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Australia, Indonesia and the UK
- Emphasized importance of preserving access to Mexico and Canada, our two largest export markets

##### Labor Reform and H-2A Challenges

- Outlined the escalating costs and administrative burdens of the H-2A program
- Requested a “primary duties test” to allow flexibility for agricultural workers
- Encouraged DOL to settle ongoing lawsuits to bring certainty for the industry
- Thanked the Administration for recognizing the value of ag workers and offered to assist in shaping new labor initiatives

#### USDA Programs and AEWR Reform

- Requested renewed efforts to revise the USDA Farm Labor Survey used to calculate the AEWR
- Expressed appreciation for AMS apple procurement efforts, including \$100M in Section 32 apple purchases for food banks
- Shared market and production data to support expanded USDA efforts

Follow-up discussions are already scheduled as USApple continues working with federal agencies to ensure apple growers’ voices remain central to trade and labor policy development. USApple’s SVP Diane Kurrle will be back at the DOL on Monday for a working meeting with senior staff to discuss President Trump’s recent announcement acknowledging the importance of agriculture workers and offer our assistance in crafting potential new initiatives.

### ***Farm Bureau Updates***

#### **Pennsylvania Farm Bureau Hosts Annual State Legislative Conference**

Hundreds of Pennsylvania Farm Bureau members traveled to Harrisburg to discuss Pennsylvania Farm Bureau’s (PFB) priorities for 2025 with state lawmakers as part of PFB’s annual State Legislative Conference on Tuesday.

PFB members, legislators and their staff attended a luncheon where they heard from key state officials, including Governor Josh Shapiro, Secretary of Agriculture Russell Redding, House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Chair Rep. Eddie Day Pashinski, House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Minority Chair Rep. Dan Moul and Senator Judy Schwank, the Senate Agriculture and Rural Affairs Minority Chair.

Gov. Shapiro reinforced his commitment to Pennsylvania's agricultural industry at today's conference. Shapiro also emphasized the partnership between the legislature, Farm Bureau and his administration which has been working hard to continue to keep agriculture a top priority in the 2025-26 state budget.

During a news conference at the Capitol, PFB President Chris Hoffman shared PFB’s 2025 state priorities, including the challenges that wildlife damage presents to farmers’ bottom lines. Hoffman noted that PFB has been working with legislators in both the House and Senate to help mitigate this. Other topics discussed included energy, environmental issues, dairy and the state budget.

## *Morning Ag Clips*

### **Secretary Rollins Announces New State Directors for FSA, Rural Development**

WASHINGTON — U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins today announced the latest slate of presidential appointments for key Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Rural Development (RD) State Director roles.

“When America’s farming communities prosper, the entire nation thrives. This new group of USDA appointees will ensure President Trump’s America First agenda is a reality in rural areas across the country. I am grateful for the leadership of these new state directors and look forward to their work reorienting the agency to put Farmers First again,” said Secretary Rollins.

FSA State Directors help implement President Trump’s America First agenda and execute the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) policies in planning, organizing, and administering FSA programs through state offices across the country. RD State Directors help affirm the mission of the Trump Administration by focusing on finding ways to empower rural America and unleash economic prosperity.

...Pennsylvania

Michael Cabell Appointed as State Director, Pennsylvania Rural Development

Michael Cabell serves as the State Director for Rural Development in Pennsylvania. He previously served in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, where he worked on issues impacting infrastructure, economic growth, and education in rural communities. Before his legislative service, Michael co-founded a multi-site behavioral healthcare company that serves communities across Pennsylvania...

– May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2025

### **USDA to Issue \$1.3 Billion to Specialty Crop Producers**

COLLEGE STATION, Texas — U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins, on April 29, 2025, announced a second round of payments coming this week for specialty crop producers through the Marketing Assistance for Specialty Crops (MASC) program, providing up to \$1.3 billion in additional program assistance. U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) already delivered just under \$900 million in first round payments to eligible producers.

About MASC

First announced in December 2024, MASC authorized \$2 billion in Commodity Credit Corporation funds to assist specialty crop growers with rising input costs and aid in the expansion of domestic markets. In January 2025, in response to stakeholder feedback and program demand, funding for MASC was increased to \$2.65 billion. The MASC application period closed on Jan. 10, 2025.

MASC is designed to help specialty crop producers meet higher marketing costs related to:

- perishability of specialty crops like fruits, vegetables, floriculture, nursery crops and herbs;
- specialized handling and transport equipment with temperature and humidity control;
- packaging to prevent damage;
- moving perishables to market quickly; and
- higher labor costs.

MASC covers the following commercially marketed specialty crops:

- fruits (fresh, dried);
- vegetables (including dry edible beans and peas, mushrooms, and vegetable seed);
- tree nuts;
- and other specialty crops – April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025

## **U.S. Tariffs: “Privileged” Talks Expected with 15 Countries**

GENEVA (AP) — The Swiss president says Switzerland is among 15 countries with which the United States plans to conduct “privileged” negotiations to help reach a deal in the wake of sweeping U.S. tariffs on dozens of countries that have shaken global markets.

Karin Keller-Sutter, in an interview with broadcaster SRF published Friday, said she was “satisfied” with talks in Washington this week that included an International Monetary Fund conference and her one-on-one meeting with U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent. Keller-Sutter also serves as Switzerland’s finance minister.

“The United States has defined a group of 15 countries with which it wants to find ... a quick solution in this tariff question. Switzerland is part of this group of these 15 countries,” she told reporters separately late Thursday in Washington.

It was not immediately clear which 14 other countries were included, but she told SRF that “the U.S. envisages conducting — I would say somewhat privileged — negotiations and finding solutions” with that group.

Before the Trump administration paused some of its most stringent tariff plans, products imported from Switzerland had been set to face tariffs of 31% — more than the 20% tariffs on goods from the European Union. Switzerland is not a member of the 27-country bloc.

According to figures published by the Swiss Embassy in Washington, the U.S. has been Switzerland’s most important goods export market worldwide since 2021, while Switzerland is the fourth most important export market for U.S. services. The bilateral trade volume in goods and services between Switzerland and the U.S. reached a total of \$185.9 billion in 2023, the embassy says on its website.

Keller-Sutter said a memorandum of understanding was to be drawn up after which negotiations can begin. A document would also lay out the most important topics, and “we have also been assigned a specific contact person. This is not easy in the U.S. administration,” she was quoted as saying.

“The U.S. authorities have clearly expressed their desire to find a solution with Switzerland,” Keller-Sutter told SRF. She said no timetable had been set, but the two sides agreed to move forward quickly “because uncertainty is poison for the economy.”

Trump’s sweeping “Liberation Day” tariffs on April 2 set off turmoil in world stock markets. A week later, Trump spoke by phone with Keller-Sutter in a conversation that her office said focused on tariffs. She emphasized the “important role of Swiss companies and investments” in the U.S.

Hours later, Trump announced the U-turn that paused the steep new tariffs on about 60 countries for 90 days, fanning speculation — which was not confirmed — in some Swiss media that her chat with Trump might have played a role in the change of course.

On Thursday, Swiss Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis, during a trip to Beijing, said the U.S. tariffs have thrust the affected countries into “a sort of coalition” to try to reach a deal with the United States. And on Monday, Swiss pharmaceuticals giant Roche announced plans to invest \$50 billion in the U.S. over the next five years — an unspecified amount of which has already been under way. -April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2025