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Question1: Biotechnology has improved the agriculture industry, farmers, consumers and the environment. But these benefits are limited to major field crops of corn, soybeans and cotton. Similar benefits based on biotech improvements to smaller and specialty crops are being denied, largely due to USDA regulatory obstructions and the inordinate costs of regulatory compliance and approvals. The new Farm Bill should address this injustice by funding Specialty Crop Regulatory Initiative (SCRI) to help obtain regulatory approvals for biotechnology derived specialty crop varieties, modeled after the IR4 program.

Question2: Competitiveness requires constant innovation and improvement. But US farmers are being hindered due to the dearth of new specialty crop varieties, especially those developed using biotechnology. Biotech varieties in major crops provide better yields and profitability, decreased pesticide usage and more environmentally sustainable farming practices. The new Farm Bill can help deploy these (and other) benefits more widely in the agriculture community by supporting SCRI, which will spur the development of biotech specialty crops.

Question3:

Question4: Biotechnology developed crops better suited to reduce the amount of tillage (which leads to soil erosion), and is being developed to provide more nutritious and safer foods grown with fewer resources, the true definition of sustainable agriculture. However, these benefits apply only to a few major crops, but not to the bulk of our fruits, vegetables, and other so-called specialty crops. The new Farm Bill should ensure these smaller crops contribute to farmers, consumers and the environment by funding the Specialty Crop Regulatory Initiative (SCRI), which will facilitate, in an IR4-like manner, the regulatory approvals for specialty crops developed using biotechnology.

Question5: Investing in rural America means investing in new technologies to improve agriculture. In addition to funding research and development, USDA needs to ensure the fruits of these R&D investments do not ?wither on the vine? or ?languish on the shelf? due to solvable obstacles. One outstanding obstacle is the extremely expensive regulatory oversight of new crops developed using biotechnology. The Specialty Crop Regulatory Initiative (SCRI), if funded, will help gain regulatory approvals for biotech derived specialty crop varieties.

Question6: USDA, universities and private labs use biotechnology to develop new crop varieties with a wide range of benefits that will accrue to consumers, the environment and help revitalize agriculture, especially smaller and specialty farmers. But these and other potential products remain undeveloped due to the disincentive of inordinately high regulatory compliance costs. The Specialty Crop Regulatory Initiative (SCRI), if funded, will help put some of these improved specialty crops on the market and provide incentive to develop others, by providing a means to overcome the regulatory hurdles without compromising health or environmental safety.

