

TESTIMONY BY CONGRESSMAN LES AuCOIN
Before the Agriculture and Related Agencies Subcommittee
of the House Appropriations Committee
March 30, 1977

FILBERT RESEARCH URGENTLY NEEDED

Mr. Chairman:

I'm here today to plead the cause of one of the smallest, the most successful, -- but perhaps the most endangered -- programs to operate in my Congressional district.

I'm referring to the filbert research program, operated by USDA's Agricultural Research Service.

In 1972, the operating budget for this program stood at \$14,062. It has steadily declined since that time and today stands at a paltry \$1,900. (I would like to submit for the record a year by year summary of the program's operating budget since 1972).

This 87 percent decline in support comes on top of a 41.3 percent increase in the cost of living during this same period. This has had a devastating impact on the ability of the program to continue on-going projects or to initiate research on new problems.

To keep the program viable an additional annual operating allowance of at least \$10,000 is urgently needed. This would bring the operating budget up to \$11,900 -- the level at which it stood in 1973. I was tempted to ask for more in view of the fact that while this increase will restore the program's actual budget to 1973 levels, it will not restore its purchasing power to 1973 levels. However, I realize that budget restrictions must force all of us to tighten our belts. I therefore offer this as a minimum, no-frills operating budget which will simply sustain the filbert program during the 1978 fiscal year.

To adequately explain the importance of this program to the Pacific Northwest, I need to back up and tell you a little about the filbert industry.

There are slightly more than 2,000 filbert growers in the United States, most of whom live in my district. The industry is concentrated in the coastal valleys of the Pacific Northwest because of the ideal climate conditions. Today the industry involves some 25,000 acres, although there is suitable land available for a four fold increase. In parts of the Willamette Valley, which I represent, about 1,000 acres of new filberts are planted each year.

In recent years the domestic industry has been increasingly threatened by lower priced filbert imports which do not have to meet the same rigorous marketing standards which our own filberts do. Our growers have remained competitive largely through advances in technology which have enabled them to increase their yield and improve their marketing capability.

This is where the filbert research program comes in.

Dr. Harry B. Lagerstedt, director and sole full time employee of this program, has focused his research on ways to reduce operating costs, increase nursery and orchard management efficiency, and increase nut yield.

While I have a lengthy list of Dr. Lagerstedt's accomplishments to submit for the record, I would like to highlight one current study as an example of what this program can do for local filbert growers.

The study involves three flower related problems which have seriously impaired filbert yield. Dr. Lagerstedt estimates that solving any one of these three could result in a 10 percent yield increase. In 1975, Oregon's total crop was valued at \$8.3 million at the farm gate. A 10 percent increase would thus be equivalent to an additional annual gross of \$832,000. For those of you given to comparing costs to benefits, you might be interested to know that the annual cost of this project is only \$4,500.

Dr. Lagerstedt has also undertaken research on a serious problem facing filbert growers called biennial bearing which causes filbert yields to fluctuate wildly from year to year and throws orderly marketing arrangements into chaos. Problems with rootstocks, tree spacing and training, weed control and filbert blight have also been studied.

The importance of this research to the domestic industry's success is not lost on the growers. In the past year the Oregon Filbert Commission -- an agency funded by filbert growers -- contributed \$5,700 of its own money to help keep the program operating. From 1967 to 1975 this support has totalled \$36,720. I emphasize this only because I want the Committee to understand that filbert growers are not a group to take federal assistance for granted. They are willing to do their share to help a program which has helped them.

I now urge this Committee to do its share and appropriate a realistic sum -- \$11,900 -- to continue the filbert research program in the Northwest at a productive level.