



**STATE OF MISSISSIPPI
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND COMMERCE**

ANDY GIPSON
COMMISSIONER

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 7, 2024

Contact: **Paige Manning, Director of Marketing and Public Relations**
(601) 359-1163 / cell: (662) 312-5897
Paige@mdac.ms.gov

Hannah East, Marketing Specialist
(601) 359-1179
HannahE@mdac.ms.gov

MDAC Now Accepting Applications for Specialty Crop Block Grant

JACKSON, Miss. – Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Andy Gipson announced the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce (MDAC) is now accepting proposals for the 2024 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program.

The Specialty Crop Block Grant Program is funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and authorized by the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (Farm Bill). The purpose of the program is to enhance the competitiveness of Mississippi's specialty crop industry by leveraging efforts to market and promote specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers.

Specialty crops are defined as fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture and nursery crops, including floriculture. Specialty crops are an important part of Mississippi's agriculture, accounting for more than \$205 million of our state's agriculture industry last year.

Past project examples include increasing awareness and consumption of specialty crops to school-aged children through garden grants; developing and implementing promotional and marketing campaigns to educate the public on the benefits of buying and consuming locally-grown specialty crops; improving food safety through Good Agricultural Practices; evaluating management strategies to improve health of honey bee colonies; evaluating potential new crops for viable production in the state; grower training and educational workshops on improving specialty crop production and increasing marketing opportunities; evaluating grafting techniques in tomatoes for improving plant disease resistance, productivity and quality; evaluating native Christmas trees for increased production in Mississippi; and high tunnel research trials on a variety of fruits, vegetables and herbs.

Eligible applicants include producer groups and associations, non-profits, colleges and universities. Funding will not be awarded to projects that solely benefit a particular commercial product or provide a profit to a single organization, institution or individual. Single organizations, institutions and individuals are encouraged to participate as project partners. Applications must be submitted to MDAC by Wednesday, March 20, 2024. To obtain an application, visit the 'Alerts and Announcements' section at www.mdac.ms.gov, call Susan Lawrence at (601) 213-7542, or email susan@mdac.ms.gov.

###

