



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

ANDY GIPSON
COMMISSIONER

PRESS RELEASE

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MDAC 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 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 \$203 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 campaigns to educate the public on the benefits of buying and consuming locally-grown specialty crops; improving food safety through Good Agricultural Practices; researching the impacts of soil moisture sensors on vegetable yields; using cutting edge genetic techniques to discover the underlying genetic cause of white drupelet disorder on blackberries; and field research to determine the effects of off-target auxin herbicide application timing and rate in sweet potato production fields.

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 March 31, 2021. 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.

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