



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

ANDY GIPSON  
COMMISSIONER

# PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: November 19, 2021

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## Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce Receives USDA Specialty Crop Grant

**Jackson, Miss.** – Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Andy Gipson announced that the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce (MDAC) has been awarded a \$425,800.19 grant from United States Department of Agriculture’s Agricultural Marketing Service to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops grown in Mississippi through the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program.

“Specialty crops are a vital part of Mississippi’s agriculture industry,” said Commissioner Gipson. “Horticulture crops along with sweet potatoes were responsible for a more than \$203 million impact to our state’s agriculture industry in 2020. Through this grant program, our state will be able to continue to research, promote and further enhance the state’s specialty crop industry.”

MDAC is partnering with two agricultural entities to implement 12 projects impacting specialty crops through research, education, training and technical assistance, and promotion and marketing. The partnerships include the Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation’s Farm Families of Mississippi and Mississippi State University.

- The Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation/Farm Families of Mississippi will develop and implement a promotional campaign educating consumers on the turfgrass industry in Mississippi.
- Mississippi State University has been awarded the following projects to:
  - Research and develop optical imaging technology for enhanced detection of Spotted Wing *Drosophila* infestation in blueberries;
  - Determine the extent of sweet potato weevil presence in Mississippi counties defined as “eradication areas” through extended weevil trapping and update information that best protects Mississippi sweet potato growers;
  - Determine presence of heavy metals in Mississippi soils and sweet potatoes;
  - Research effective control of problematic weeds in tomato production systems by increasing tolerance of tomatoes to effective herbicides using safeners;
  - Increase producer access, awareness, and knowledge of native Christmas trees through further research and educational/demonstration efforts;
  - Implement greenhouse hydroponic technologies, environmental controls, and water and nutrient management strategies to mitigate seasonal fluctuations in vegetable yields, quality, and nutritional values;

- Design and evaluate a machine vision technology-based inspection system for automatically grading and sorting sweet potatoes;
- Research cucumber varieties in high tunnel production systems;
- Research and evaluate bermudagrass varieties for hybrid development;
- Research microgreen yield and nutrient content in various production trials; and
- Conduct valued-added product trainings for Christmas tree growers.

Through the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, USDA awards grants to state departments of agriculture to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops as defined as fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture crops and nursery crops, including floriculture.

For more information on the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, visit [www.mdac.ms.gov](http://www.mdac.ms.gov) and follow the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce on Facebook.

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