



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

CINDY HYDE-SMITH
COMMISSIONER

PRESS RELEASE

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MDAC Offers Cost-Share Program for Farmers Obtaining Food Safety Certification

JACKSON, Miss. — The Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce (MDAC) is currently offering a cost-share program to provide financial assistance to Mississippi farmers obtaining the Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Good Handling Practices (GHP) certifications.

Produce suppliers can acquire the Good Agricultural Practices and Good Handling Practices certifications by allowing a USDA certifier to conduct a voluntary audit throughout their production and supply chain. The Good Agricultural Practices and Good Handling Practices audit focuses on best agricultural practices to verify that fruits and vegetables are produced, packed, handled and stored in the safest manner possible to minimize risks of microbial food safety hazards.

With food safety being a top priority for consumers, farmers are always looking for ways to improve agricultural practices, Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Cindy Hyde-Smith said.

“The Good Agricultural Practices and Good Handling Practices cost-share program will assist farmers in making food safety a priority,” Hyde-Smith said. “It will help our farmers receive certification that verifies they are taking the proper precautions throughout the entire crop production process to ensure a safe food supply. The certification can also open up new marketing opportunities for our farmers, allowing them to sell their products through avenues not previously available.”

Funds for the cost-share program are provided through the USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program. This program will reimburse eligible farmers that have successfully passed a Good Agricultural Practices and Good Handling Practices audit 75 percent of the cost, up to a maximum of \$500 per year. Reimbursement is for the initial audit only. Funds are available on a first-come, first-serve basis until the funds are depleted. Audits must be completed by an approved USDA certifier. To request an audit, complete the Audit Request Form located at <http://bit.ly/2v6L77u> or contact Kevin Riggan at kevin@mdac.ms.gov or (601) 359-1138.

In an effort to promote the cost-share program and educate farmers on the importance of implementing food safety practices on the farm, the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce also recently released a 15-minute informational video. Farmers can obtain a copy of the food safety video in DVD format from MDAC or view the video online on the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce’s YouTube page, <http://bit.ly/2tOw26r>.

“We are excited to announce a new source of information for farmers interested in implementing a food safety program on their farm or packing facility,” Hyde-Smith said. “This video will not only educate but also prepare farmers for a food safety audit.”

To request a copy of the food safety video or to receive more information about the Good Agricultural Practices and Good Handling Practices cost-share program, contact Susan Head at susan@mdac.ms.gov or 601-359-1196. The cost-share application is available at www.mdac.ms.gov.

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