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COMMISSIONER

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Mississippi Department of Agriculture Receives USDA Specialty Crop Grant

Jackson, Miss. – Commissioner Lester Spell announced that the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce has been awarded a grant from the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops grown in Mississippi under the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program.

“This program will help enable the Mississippi farming community to bring awareness of the importance of our state's specialty crops to the citizens of Mississippi. This specialty funding will allow Mississippi farmers to showcase their specialty products such as fruits and vegetables to the general public, as well as, provide much needed assistance to growers through much needed university research,” said Spell.

The Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce is partnering with four agricultural organizations and universities to promote the state's specialty crop industry through research, educational opportunities, promotional campaigns, financial assistance, and the development of marketing and educational tools. The partnerships include Alcorn State University, Mississippi State University, the Mississippi Nursery and Landscape Association, and the Mississippi Beekeepers Association.

Alcorn State University will use funding to evaluate and research various outlets for the use of medicinal herbs that will benefit Mississippi growers and further their marketing initiatives. Mississippi State University will conduct various educational and research based initiatives through specialty crop producer workshops, high tunnel specialty crop demonstrations, and beneficial research for strawberries and cut flowers. The Mississippi Nursery and Landscape Association will use funds to promote their Green and Sustainable Initiative Program that promotes the proper use of specialty nursery plants in Mississippi landscapes. The Mississippi Beekeepers Association will use funds to help continue its successful producer cost-share program to provide financial assistance to beginning beekeepers pursuing the establishment of honeybee colonies.

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). The Mississippi Department of Agriculture is now accepting applications for FY09 Specialty Crop Block Grant funding. For more details, visit the Department's website, www.mdac.state.ms.us.

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