



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND COMMERCE
LESTER SPELL, JR., D.V.M.
COMMISSIONER

PRESS RELEASE

Contact: Andy Prosser
(601) 359-1158
E-mail: andy@mdac.state.ms.us

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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 \$268,376.55 grant from USDA’s Agricultural Marketing Service to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops grown in Mississippi through the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program.

“This program positively impacts many facets of Mississippi’s specialty crop industry from production to research and marketing. A number of specialty crops, such as fruits and vegetables, are grown in our state, and this funding will help enable this sector of Mississippi agriculture to experience continued growth through the use of innovative production and marketing methods,” said Spell.

The Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce is partnering with six agricultural entities to promote the state’s specialty crop industry through research, educational opportunities, promotional campaigns, and the development of marketing and educational tools. The partnerships include the Mississippi Association of Cooperatives, Mississippi Beekeepers Association, Mississippi Nursery and Landscape Association, Mississippi State University, Mississippi Sweet Potato Council, and the Mississippi Urban Forest Council.

The Mississippi Association of Cooperatives will implement a statewide promotion and marketing program for small farmers and provide regional educational and training opportunities. The Mississippi Beekeepers Association will conduct educational workshops for beginner and advanced beekeepers and conduct a small hive beetle trap evaluation study to test the efficacy of a potential marketable trap for the adult, small hive beetle. The Mississippi Nursery and Landscape Association will implement a marketing campaign to promote native Mississippi plants through the Mississippi Medallion Program. Mississippi State University will investigate the usage of various high tunnel systems for specialty cut flower production, develop specialty crop educational opportunities for Mississippi producers, research organic production methods in high tunnels and develop best management practices, assess the state of safety and quality of Mississippi grown produce and train farmers on the latest safety guidelines/regulations and Good Agricultural and Manufacturing Practices, develop educational opportunities and materials for farmers market managers and vendors relating to food safety, and conduct research to identify and collect heirloom apple cultivars that will grow successfully in Mississippi. The Mississippi Sweet Potato Council will implement a marketing and educational campaign to increase the consumption of Mississippi grown sweet potatoes. The Mississippi Urban Forest Council will establish a model community fruit orchard and vegetable garden in the Jackson area to educate consumers on fruit and vegetable production and increase the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables.

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).

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