



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

CINDY HYDE-SMITH
COMMISSIONER

PRESS RELEASE

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Hyde-Smith Announces Cost-Share Program to Assist Fruit and Vegetable Growers

Commissioner Cindy Hyde-Smith announced that the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce is currently offering a cost-share program to provide financial assistance to Mississippi fruit and vegetable farmers receiving Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Good Handling Practices (GHP) Certification. Eligible farmers will receive reimbursement for 75 percent of the certification costs up to a maximum of \$500. GAP/GHP audits are voluntary independent audits of produce suppliers throughout the production and supply chain. These audits focus 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.

“Food safety is not only a concern of consumers; it is a priority of our growers as well. This program will assist our farmers in receiving certification to verify that they are taking the proper precautions throughout the entire crop production process to ensure that they are providing a safe food supply. This certification will create new marketing opportunities for our farmers allowing them to sell their products through avenues not available to them without certification,” said Commissioner Cindy Hyde-Smith.

To receive reimbursement, farmers must submit a completed application with proper documentation of costs incurred. Only audits completed by an approved USDA certifier will be eligible for reimbursement. A list of auditor contacts is available at www.ams.usda.gov/gapghp. Funds are available on a first-come, first-serve basis until the funds are depleted. Funding for this program is provided through the USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program.

For more information about this program or to obtain an application, visit www.mdac.ms.gov, call Michael Lasseter at (601) 359-1120, or email michaelL@mdac.ms.gov. Funds are available on a first-come, first-serve basis.

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