Fiscal Year 2026 Description of Funded Projects – Farm Bill

Number of Grants Awarded: 56
Number of Subaward Projects: 608
Amount of Funds Awarded: $86,621,000
For more information, please visit the program's website: https://www.ams.usda.gov/scbpg

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND INDUSTRIES

Funds Awarded to the State: $663,879.37 ● Number of Subawards: 17

The Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 11 research projects, 2 education and outreach projects, 3 marketing projects, and 1 project that crosses more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including strawberries, blackberries, pecans, and watermelons throughout the State of Alabama.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Connecting Growers and Consumers: Advancing Alabama's Specialty Crop Industry	Montgomery	The **Alabama Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association** will support Alabama producers by providing research-based training and resources on specialty crop production, pest and disease management, food safety, and marketing. This project creates new pathways for education, connection, and market development through annual conferences, regional growers meetings, sampling and recipe distribution events, and related consumer outreach to advance Alabama's specialty crop industry.	$25,000.00
Improving Pecan Production in Alabama with Educational Conferences and Farm Tours	Lillian	The **Alabama Pecan Growers Association** seeks to provide the latest and most current research based educational information on pecan production practices, pest management, and marketing programs by utilizing annual conference presentations and farm tours. Sharing information on disease, insects, and weeds affecting pecan production will also help growers decide how to enhance their orchard management plans to improve productivity.	$24,796.00
Expanding the Alabama Honey Festival to Strengthen Alabama Specialty Crop Producer	Hampton Cove	**Alchemy Farms and Plants, LLC** will expand the Alabama Honey Festival by increasing capacity, enhancing educational programming, and replicating the event in additional regions across Alabama. This expansion aims to strengthen market access for local producers, broaden consumer education, and promote sustainable beekeeping practices statewide.	$24,820.42

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Operation Grow: Expanding Infrastructure and Peer Support for Beginning Veteran Farmers	Auburn	**Auburn University's** Operation Grow (OG) will expand statewide training, coordinated technical assistance, shared-use equipment access, and peer networking for beginning veteran farmers successfully producing specialty crops. OG will provide experiential learning opportunities through 12 OG Bootcamps, enhancing the OG-HELP equipment loan program, and hosting at least two equipment trainings each year. Through these efforts, Operation Grow will increase the number of veterans equipped to produce specialty crops, improve statewide agricultural capacity, and contribute to Alabama's long-term agricultural sustainability.	$44,962.00
Investigating Alternatives to Amitraz for Improved Honeybee	Auburn	**Auburn University** Extension will conduct field studies and educational events to promote science-based research on the Varroa mite (a tiny external parasite that feeds on honeybees) and management options for Alabama beekeepers. This project will investigate and monitor amitraz resistance in the varroa mite and explore alternative integrated pest management methods and strategies. Results will be communicated to Alabama stakeholders, including large-scale professional beekeepers through personal interactions during amitraz resistance monitoring; hobby beekeepers during in-person education events; and to the public/online through the Auburn University Bees YouTube channel.	$40,377.00
AI Enabled Smart Inventory Tools for Alabama Nursery Growers	Auburn	**Auburn University** and the Alabama Department of Agriculture and Industries will develop practical AI tools to automate ornamental nursery inventory, helping Alabama growers reduce labor, improve plant counts, and make better production decisions. This project will help automate plant counting and inventory management in Alabama container nurseries through developing and demonstrating an AI enabled drone imaging system.	$40,000.00
Securing Alabama's Strawberry Future with Biochar Innovation to Optimize Soil Moisture, Nutrient Retention, and Crop Health	Auburn	**Auburn University** will perform project tests for strawberries showing biochar as a natural soil amendment to manage water and nutrients that creates a healthier root environment, prevents disease, and reduces chemical use. This study will determine biochar’s practical usefulness in promoting plant vigor, enhancing nutrient availability, and perfecting water management, ultimately providing a scalable, "low-pesticide" blueprint that secures the competitiveness of Alabama growers.	$40,000.00
Evaluation of Drip-Applied Preemergence Herbicides in Plasticulture Strawberry Production in Alabama	Auburn	**Auburn University** will investigate the use of drip-applied pre-emergent herbicides for the control of broadleaf weeds to reduce hand-weeding removal in plasticulture strawberry production. Activities will include 1) evaluating the efficacy of drip-applied pre-emergence herbicides compared to spray application, 2) determining weed suppression efficacy by individual weed species for each herbicide and application method, and 3) quantifying strawberry yield differences among herbicide treatments and application methods. Results will be used to develop integrated weed management recommendations that incorporate herbicide placement, application timing, and mulch management and row-middle vegetation control practices for Alabama strawberry producers.	$40,000.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Strategies for Monitoring and Management of Thrips and TSWV in Tomatoes	Auburn	**Auburn University** will evaluate sustainable integrated pest management strategies for the reduction of thrips and tomato spotted wilt virus (TSWV) in Alabama tomato production. Researchers will incorporate targeted pest monitoring, assess optimization of insecticide rotation strategies, identify disease outbreak and potential host plant resistance-breaking strain surges, and provide timely low-risk control interventions. Through field trials, outreach programs, and stakeholder engagement, this on-farm applied research project will equip Alabama tomato growers with effective science-based, sustainable pest and disease management strategies.	$40,000.00
CoolBot: A Simple Cooling Technology to Improve Shelf-Life of Alabama Vegetables	Auburn	**Auburn University** and Alabama Cooperative Extension System will work with Alabama Department of Agriculture & Industries, Alabama Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association, and Deep South Food Alliance to evaluate how implementing CoolBot cold storage technology affects shelf-life, preservation of quality, and reduction in postharvest loss. This project will store Alabama specialty crops—specifically collards, okra, sweet corn, and southern pea—under ambient conditions in a commercial cold room and in a CoolBot-equipped room to assess the marketability, decay, and weight loss of products under various postharvest storage conditions. Results will be shared through extension programming, grower outreach, and hands-on training.	$40,000.00
Selecting Profitable Thornless Blackberry Cultivars for the Gulf Coast	Auburn	**Auburn University** will lead a study to evaluate the productivity and economic benefits of growing new blackberry cultivars in South Alabama. The project will include a rigorous, research-based blackberry cultivar evaluation to generate cultivar and management recommendations for south Alabama growers, with emphasis on improving spring/summer blackberry production and profitability. It will also include practical management recommendations for hot, humid climates. Results and recommendations will be delivered to stakeholders that include basic economic considerations for adoption.	$40,000.00
Validating New Tools for Bacterial Spot Control and Peach Orchard Health	Auburn	**Auburn University** will conduct research on incorporating “good viruses” into current disease prevention methods for Alabama peach growers, which use harsh copper sprays. This project will determine an optimal hybrid approach that assesses the addition of bacteriophage products and the reduction of copper reliance without sacrificing the premium quality and size required for market success. By providing a data-validated, threshold-based system, researchers aim to protect the longevity of southeastern orchards and reduce the chemical footprint of their operations.	$40,000.00
Evaluating Tea as a New Specialty Crop for Alabama	Auburn	**Auburn University** will lead a three-year, multi-location field trial to evaluate the production potential of tea (Camellia sinensis) in Alabama. The project will generate data on plant survival, growth rate, yield, and pest and disease incidence. By reducing uncertainty around agronomic performance and pest risk, this project will improve producer readiness, support specialty crop diversification, and help position Alabama as an early leader in domestic tea production. Results will be shared with growers and potential tea processors through extension outreach events.	$45,000.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Exploring New Storage Methods to Extend the Shelf-Life of Alabama Small Fruits	Auburn	**Auburn University** and partners will assess the effectiveness of RipeLocker chambers, a low-pressure controlled-atmosphere technology, on the shelf-life and market quality of Alabama grown blueberry and blackberry cultivars. Findings will be shared at specialty crop grower demonstrations and on-farm evaluations and feedback collected on the feasibility and adoption of controlled-atmosphere storage for Alabama specialty crop producers.	$40,000.00
Marketing and Promotion Campaign for Alabama Watermelons	Dothan	The **Gulf Coast Watermelon Association** will implement a comprehensive marketing and promotion campaign featuring Alabama watermelons through market promotions, product sampling and recipe development, radio and television interviews and specials, social media and advertising, and farm demonstrations. Consumers will be engaged where watermelons are sold, grown, and showcased, while also reaching new audiences during peak watermelon season and year-round.	$24,927.75
Gardens 2 Afterschool: Expanding Specialty Crop Education with Extended School Day Programming	Tuscaloosa	**Schoolyard Roots** will pilot an afterschool garden education program at four elementary schools in Tuscaloosa County to increase the awareness and consumption of specialty crops among K-5 students. The program will include enriching experiences through agriculture and gardening demonstrations and nutrition education, with hands-on learning on how to raise and prepare specialty crops.	$25,000.00
Cultivar Screening and Post-harvest Interventions to Improve Berry Production, Shelf-life, and Safety	Livingston	The **University of West Alabama** will conduct field trails to screen and adopt berry cultivars for stress-adapted berry plantations with the goal of reviving berry production in Alabama. Trials will assess cultivar adaptability, research disease causing bacteria, and develop postharvest interventions and disinfection applications. Upon project completion, results will dictate garden-specific cultivar recommendations and optimized disinfection processes of berries. The experimental data will be shared with the public via professional platforms.	$40,000.00

ALASKA DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE

Funds Awarded to State: $304,579.82 ● Number of Subawards: 5

The Alaska Division of Agriculture and Industries will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 2 research projects, 1 education and outreach project, 1 marketing project, and 1 project that crosses more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including black currant, kelp, peonies, and winter squash throughout the State of Alaska.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Growing Wholesale Market Opportunities for Specialty Crops: A Toolkit for Local Procurement in Alaska	Homer	The **Alaska Food Policy Council** will develop and distribute a free Alaska Local Procurement Toolkit that helps specialty crop producers and wholesale buyers build successful partnerships by providing practical resources, shared guidance, and statewide outreach to expand access to Alaska-grown specialty crops. The toolkit will include producer-readiness checklists, buyer sourcing guidance, seasonal availability information, product specification examples, communication templates, model procurement policies, guidance on food safety documentation, and real-world case examples from Alaska producers and buyers.	$59,025.50
Alaska Peony Extract Regulatory Compliance	Anchorage	**EagleSong Family Peony Farm** will conduct research on value-added processing opportunities using Alaska grown peonies. Peony and foliage waste will be used to create high value botanical extracts and concentrates to produce natural flavoring, plant-based color, and wellness focused ingredients for food, beverage, and cosmetic products. Results collected from this research will be used to create basis for FDA Generally Recognized As Safe (GRAS) application for food and beverage approval of new value-added peony products for Alaska growers.	$59,958.00
Southeast Alaska Winter Squash Trials for Zones 4 & 5: A Three-Year Multi-Site Randomized Complete Block Variety Trial	Juneau	**Ecotrust's Henderson Community Farm** and the Four Winds Resource Center's Victory Garden will evaluate winter squash cultivars across multiple Southeast Alaska sites. The project will test 15 cultivars at two sites, each with specific microclimates including soil composition, wind turbulence, and water table, aiming to identify varieties and growing methods that reliably mature, yield, and store well in coastal USDA Hardiness Zones 4 and 5. Results will be disseminated to Alaska producers with region specific guidance for production.	$60,000.00
The State of Alaska, Division of Agriculture-Alaska Grown	Palmer	The **State of Alaska Division of Agriculture** will develop an online matchmaking tool utilizing the Alaska Grown member dashboard. This tool will connect specialty crop producers with in-state buyers, expand market opportunities, and provide producers with real time information on local demand. Current and beginning farmers will benefit from an additional feature that provides guidance on what to plant and at what volumes.	$16,866.54
The University of Alaska Fairbanks Agriculture and Forestry Experiment Station (AFES) Variety Trials Program	Fairbanks	The **University of Alaska, Fairbanks** Agriculture and Forestry Experiment Station will evaluate eight black currant cultivars to identify the best performing varieties for commercial production in Interior Alaska based on yield, fruit quality, and plant form. Performance will be assessed using standardized measures of yield, winter survivorship, disease resistance, and plant architecture as it relates to harvestability. Findings will be disseminated through on-farm workshops and formal publications.	$59,997.00

AMERICAN SAMOA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded: $307,954.07 ● Number of Territory-run Awards: TBD

The American Samoa Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty by assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and increasing knowledge to address local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The Territory's subawards are pending.

ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $1,581,448.02 ● Number of Subawards: 18

The Arizona Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 11 research projects, 5 education and outreach projects, and 2 projects that cross more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including pecans, citrus, celery, cilantro, parsley, peppers, onions, beets, beans, lettuce, spinach, broccoli, cauliflower, lemons, arugula, bok choy, squash, tomatoes, cucumbers, herbs, honey, wine grapes, chiltepin, cabbage, Medjool' dates, pistachios, brassicas, melons throughout the State of Arizona.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
The Arizona Grown® Specialty Crop Guide: Bridging Growers, Supply Chains, and Consumers Through Storytelling & Resource Expansion	Phoenix	The **Arizona Department of Agriculture**, in partnership with a local food publishing company and the Arizona Office of Tourism, will execute a two-year storytelling campaign to bridge the gap between specialty crop producers, supply chains, and consumers. The project will demystify the local food system, boost culinary tourism, and drive verifiable sales for Arizona producers.	$224,657.00
Using Native Plants to Enhance Production of Chiltepin (Capsicum Annuum Var. Glabriusculum)	Tucson	**Desert Seed Resource Center** and the University of Arizona will evaluate companion plantings to enhance production of chiltepin, a native Arizona pepper. The project explores how companion plants can improve yields and reduce water inputs. Project results and seeds will be shared directly with end users through farm tours and a cooperative extension publication.	$49,303.49
Enhancing the Commercial Availability and Economic Impact of Chiltepin Pepper	Tucson	**Native Seeds/SEARCH** will increase the commercial availability and economic impact of chiltepin pepper by regenerating and evaluating 10 chiltepin varieties that are currently unavailable to the public, expanding seed supply, developing and communicating best practices for cultivation, and partnering with Arizona farmers to cultivate the crop for seed, food, nursery stock, and a value-added product ingredient.	$97,592.65
Improving the Management of Fusarium Wilt through Field Screening for Tolerant and Resistant Cultivars	Tucson	The **University of Arizona's** Cooperative Extension will evaluate lettuce cultivars and breeding lines for tolerance and resistance to Fusarium wilt through field screenings. Results will be shared with lettuce growers, seed industry representatives, and lettuce breeders through on-site field days and presentations of results at relevant extension meetings and workshops.	$42,998.00
Protecting Arizona's Brassica Crops through Proactive Monitoring of Insecticide Resistance in Diamondback Moth Populations	Tucson	**University of Arizona** will strengthen insecticide resistance management in diamondback moth affecting Brassica vegetable production by conducting regional resistance monitoring and delivering science-based recommendations to growers and pest management professionals. This project will evaluate the susceptibility of diamondback moth populations to commonly used insecticides and establish baseline susceptibility data for newer chemistries, including Plinazolin, to preserve their long-term effectiveness.	$90,417.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Fungal Pathogens of Nut Crops: Identification and Glycolipid Sensitivity Screening	Tucson	**University of Arizona** will survey nurseries and orchards in the southern Arizona communities of Tucson, Willcox, and Bowie to identify pathogens affecting pistachio plants and evaluate pathogen sensitivity to conventional and bio-inspired glycolipid surfactant pesticides. The project will identify pesticide structures that maximize biocidal efficacy to advance sustainable, next-generation biopesticides supporting the long-term security and sustainability of Arizona's pistachio industry.	$99,462.00
Strawberry Merry: Resilient Greenhouse Hydroponic Strawberry Production using Bio-Circular Agri-Waste Substrate and Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Practices	Tucson	**University of Arizona**, Controlled Environment Agriculture Center will partner with the Arizona Department of Agriculture to measure the water use, growth, yield, quality, and pest management of multiple strawberry varieties grown in a greenhouse environment using hydroponics, alternative substrates, and integrated pest management practices. Findings will support and guide Arizona growers in resilient specialty crop strawberry production through publications, fact sheets, a website blog, and a free public workshop.	$99,973.00
Real-Time Flux Measurements to Update Seasonal Water-Use Benchmarks for Citrus and Date Palm Orchards in Yuma	Tucson	**University of Arizona** Yuma Agricultural Center will deploy two real-time flux tower systems in citrus and date palm orchards to develop locally validated seasonal water-use benchmarks. The project will provide growers, irrigation professionals, irrigation districts, and water management stakeholders with improved crop water-use information to support data-driven irrigation decision-making, help reduce over- and under-irrigation, and improve seasonal water-use planning for citrus and date palm production in Yuma County.	$94,506.00
Grower-Led Adoption of Water Conservation Technologies for Data-Driven Irrigation Decision-Making in Yuma Leafy Greens to Reduce Over-Irrigation, Disease Pressure, and Yield Loss	Yuma	**University of Arizona** Yuma Agricultural Center will work with cooperating lettuce and leafy green growers to deploy soil moisture sensor technologies in commercial fields and develop validated irrigation thresholds for data-driven irrigation decision-making. The project will provide growers with hands-on training and practical sensor-based decision guidance to help reduce over- and under-irrigation, improve water-use efficiency, and protect marketable yield and crop quality in Yuma's lettuce and leafy green production.	$92,068.00
Arizona Leafy Greens Safety Professional Certificate Program	Tucson	**University of Arizona** in partnership with the Arizona Department of Agriculture and leafy greens industry will create the statewide Arizona Leafy Greens Safety Professional Certificate program. The program will enhance the fundamental knowledge of industry professionals with the most up-to-date scientifically based practices to prevent foodborne pathogen contamination and improve overall leafy greens safety.	$77,155.00
Growing AZ: Sowing Seeds of Success	Tucson	**University of Arizona** Cooperative Extension Agricultural Literacy & Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) program will increase Kindergarten to 12th grade awareness of specialty crops by equipping teachers with training, resources, and ongoing support to implement a Specialty Crop Harvest of the Month program. The project includes an educational calendar, monthly podcast, bi-annual professional development, a digital resource hub with standards-aligned lessons, classroom implementation support, and evaluation reporting.	$26,450.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Supporting Endangered Species Act Compliance and Informing Practical Pesticide Policies for Arizona Specialty Crops	Tucson	**University of Arizona** will work with the Arizona Department of Agriculture to maintain timely and accurate statewide pesticide use data and provide specialty crop producers with practical resources to navigate new and forthcoming Environment Protection Agency (EPA) pesticide-mitigation requirements. The project will increase transparency around EPA pesticide policy decision-making through education, newsletters, and a pesticide registration web-hub; support producer compliance; and strengthen pesticide policy outcomes that help sustain robust specialty crop production in Arizona.	$84,112.00
Phytoremediation of Saline Agricultural Soils to Enhance Arizona Specialty Crop Production	Tucson	**University of Arizona** will evaluate the ability of low water use salt-accumulating plants to reduce soil salinity in vegetable fields in Yuma through greenhouse and field trials. Success would provide Yuma Valley growers with a water-conserving tool to manage soil salinity, thereby protecting the long-term competitiveness of the region's specialty crop industry.	$99,989.00
Arizona Wine Grape Production and Water Efficiency Report	Camp Verde	**University of Arizona** Cooperative Extension will improve production planning and water-use efficiency in Arizona's wine grape industry by collecting and analyzing statewide vineyard production, harvest, and irrigation data. The project will demonstrate water measurement methods, provide grower workshops, and publish two annual reports and interactive visualizations to support production and irrigation management decisions.	$38,784.00
Chemical Thinning of Dates	Tucson	**University of Arizona** will evaluate the use of two commercially available plant growth regulators to thin `Medjool' date fruits, assessing their effect on yield and fruit quality and determining if additional hand labor is needed to thin fruit further. Results will be shared with stakeholders through grower meetings, field days and a website.	$86,592.00
A Bacterial Trojan Horse to Enable Mycoviral Targeting of Fusarium	Tucson	**University of Arizona** will develop microbial tools to selectively target Fusarium oxysporum f. sp. lactucae to eliminate or reduce its virulence in lettuce. Successful development of these tools will enable deployment of anti-fungal and anti-virulence technologies to mitigate Fusarium infections, protect lettuce crops, and reduce losses for Arizona growers.	$100,000.00
Strengthening Arizona's Specialty Crops through Integrated, Data-Driven Resistance Management	Tucson	**University of Arizona** will strengthen insecticide resistance management in Arizona's specialty crop systems by expanding its Proactive Resistance Management web application to incorporate adjacent landscape pesticide data, add high-demand pest–crop scenarios, and provide ecological interpretation tools. The project will also deliver targeted extension education and longitudinal evaluation to improve pesticide decision-making and sustain insecticide efficacy for Arizona growers.	$58,328.00
Continuing Education Unit (CEU) Technician Position	Tucson	**Yuma County Cooperative Extension** will employ a Continuing Education Unit (CEU) Technician to organize specialty crop workshops, develop accredited on-demand online coursework, and produce and promote extension videos. This program will also deliver weekly television, newspaper, YouTube, and social media content promoting specialty crop research and activities occurring within Yuma County.	$23,374.00

ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $432,612.12 ● Number of Subawards: 7

The Arkansas Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 7 research projects to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including pecans, sweet potatoes, blackberries, watermelon, pumpkin, and okra throughout the State of Arkansas.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Advancing Arkansas Pecan Production and Evaluating Hazelnut Feasibility through Research and Extension	Clarksville	The **University of Arkansas** Division of Agriculture will improve pecan production and evaluate hazelnut feasibility in Arkansas by utilizing existing research plantings and establishing new plantings to assess cultivar performance, disease resistance, and management practices. Outreach will include an annual field day, targeted extension publications, and direct engagement with specialty crop producers to support adoption of improved practices.	$74,000.00
Strengthening the Sweet Potato Bioeconomy of Arkansas through High-Value Food Applications of Sweet Potato Peel	Fayetteville	The **University of Arkansas** Division of Agriculture will help strengthen the Arkansas sweet potato industry by turning sweet potato peels into a valuable natural food ingredient. The sweet potato industry generates substantial peel waste each year, resulting in disposal costs and lost economic opportunities for farmers and processors. This project will develop a viable method for using this byproduct to create a natural preservative that helps foods stay fresh longer without artificial additives.	$38,000.00
New Techniques to Advance Efficient Blackberry Production in Arkansas	Little Rock	The **University of Arkansas** Division of Agriculture will develop novel pest management and cultural practices to support efficient and improved blackberry production in Arkansas. Trials will evaluate the status of Fusarium in blackberries and develop novel tipping and training techniques for blackberries aimed at reducing labor and maximizing yield. The project will share results with growers through field days, fact sheets, and ongoing collaboration with the Arkansas Blackberry Growers Association.	$73,000.00
Transforming Discarded or Waste Pecan into High-Value Food Ingredients for Plant-Based Protein Market	Fayetteville	The **University of Arkansas** Division of Agriculture will develop an innovative method to utilize waste pecans by separating the protein from them and aims to create a niche market for pecan protein-based food products. The protein will be extracted from mildly oxidized and infested pecan nuts, thus aiming to improve the valorization of low-grade materials into high-value food products.	$45,000.00
Advancing Research and Extension for High Tunnel Growers in Arkansas	Little Rock	The **University of Arkansas** Division of Agriculture will expand statewide high tunnel outreach and education by providing hands-on workshops, regional meetups, digital outreach, and direct technical assistance for specialty crop growers and county extension agents. The project will also conduct on-farm research and demonstration trials focused on crop timing and cultivar selection to inform Arkansas-specific tools such as a high tunnel planning calendar and new crop production factsheets. These efforts will support the sustained adoption of effective high tunnel production practices and strengthen the continued success of Arkansas specialty crop growers.	$77,993.44

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Weed Management Programs for Pumpkin and Watermelon: Research and Outreach to Meet Stakeholder Needs	Fayetteville	The **University of Arkansas** Division of Agriculture will conduct replicated field trials to develop Arkansas-based and scientifically informed recommendations for weed management in pumpkin and watermelon growers, focusing on integrated pest management strategies to effectively control weeds with limited herbicide inputs. Findings will be shared with growers through field days, grower meetings, and other stakeholder events.	$56,000.00
Nutritional Composition, Bioactive Compound Extraction, and Comprehensive Characterization of Okra	Pine Bluff	The **University of Arkansas** at Pine Bluff will evaluate the nutritional composition of Arkansas-grown okra, optimize extraction of bioactive compounds, and characterize the physicochemical properties of the extracted compounds. The project will establish baseline data, identify optimal extraction conditions, and support the development of high-value food, nutraceutical, and pharmaceutical products, increasing the value and sustainable use of locally produced okra.	$21,000.00

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $28,956,253.95 ● Number of Subawards: 60

The California Department of Food and Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of subaward activities and projects. The State's subawards include 32 research projects, 16 education and outreach projects, 8 marketing projects, and 4 projects that cross more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including hybrid tomatoes, olives, leafy greens, avocadoes, citrus, table grapes, wine grapes, and hibiscus throughout the State of California.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Promoting Healthy Eating with a Family-Friendly Cooking Show Featuring California Specialty Crops	Sacramento	**3XFIVE Media, LLC (3XFIVE)** will increase the consumption of California fruits and vegetables statewide by; 1) producing a 13-episode, all-ages educational cooking show that features seasonal specialty crops; 2) creating website and digital library of show episodes and other media assets for commodity organizations to share online; and 3) conducting outreach and marketing activities to promote the show and videos widely.	$442,957.00
Supporting Childhood Fruit Consumption by Creating Relevant Uses of California Apricots with School Chefs and Student Customers	Turlock	The **Apricot Producers of California (APC)** will conduct a project benefiting the entire state of California by conducting research and developing new value-added products utilizing California grown apricots. A marketing campaign will be implemented including recipes with school chefs and students, food service partnerships and database expansion, and development of educational materials to boost apricot sales and consumption.	$332,644.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Kinfolk Kitchen: Cooking with Specialty Crops	Los Angeles	**Black Thumb Farm** will conduct a project in Los Angeles County to host 20 community workshops on seasonal consumption of specialty crops that are affordable and locally grown, providing a variety of specialty crops directly from Los Angeles urban farms. Activities will include 1) facilitating cooking workshops centering specialty crops, 2) providing the local community with information about local urban farms and other locations where they can purchase specialty crops, and 3) providing positive exposure to specialty crops through tastings and demonstrations.	$249,993.00
Growing CA GROWN Gold	El Centro	The **Buy California Marketing Agreement (BCMA)**, will implement a fully integrated specialty crop educational and marketing promotions program with specialty crop partners to drive consumer demand for California Grown specialty crops, serving the entire state.	$2,969,758.00
California Agricultural Workforce Advancement Creates a Pipeline of Skilled Farmers to Sustain California Specialty Crops	Sacramento	The **California Bountiful Foundation** will conduct a project that builds technical skills and job pathways for California's beginning specialty crop farmers, especially those who face costly training, complex regulations, and unclear career pathways statewide. The project will provide producers access to a no-cost online curriculum on crops, soil, water, integrated pest management, and business management; eight expert-led workshops in production, sustainability, labor, and food safety compliance; and certification with direct job access through online portals.	$499,794.00
Expanding California Olive Oil Awareness and Sales Among Emerging Consumer Audiences	Paso Robles	The **California Olive Oil Council** will conduct a project that supports California's specialty crop farmers by growing California extra virgin olive oil (EVOO) awareness and sales to this target audience through 1) new marketing assets, 2) “Farm to Bottle California EVOO” tours, and 3) social media advertising.	$500,000.00
Automated Harvesting System for Table Grapes: Enhancing Efficiency and Reducing Labor Dependence	San Luis Obispo	**California Polytechnic State University** will lead a project to advance automated table grape harvesting systems. This project integrates robotics and artificial intelligence to build a mobile robotic platform with custom robotic arms designed for table grape harvesting.	$497,404.00
Certified to Grow: Expanding Nursery Certification and Training Pathways	Sacramento	**CANERS Foundation Endowment for Research and Scholarship (CANERS)** will conduct a project to modernize the California Certified Nursery Professional (CCN Pro) certification exam and study materials. This project will pilot new student curricula and expand access statewide via teacher engagement, industry events, and websites and online training portals for retail nursery staff. These materials will increase general knowledge, plant identification, and landscape design.	$500,000.00
Whole Farm Nitrogen and Irrigation Management for Central Coast Specialty Crops	Sacramento	The **California Department of Food and Agriculture’s Inspection Services** will conduct a project that provides specialized, sustained technical assistance to specialty crop growers on the Central Coast. This project on soil and water monitoring throughout the growing season supports adoption of methods to reduce water use and improve water efficiency as well as testing for nitrogen in soil.	$499,904.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Students at the Table: Cultivating Agency to Increase Fruit and Vegetable Consumption in Schools	Berkeley	The **Center for Ecoliteracy** will run a statewide educational campaign including video, posters, flyers, digital graphics, and slides to establish a shared foundation among students, families, and educators about the role of local specialty crops in school meals. This will include both in-person workshops as well as virtual training.	$495,263.00
North State Harvest of the Month	Chico	The **Center for Healthy Communities (CHC)** will increase familiarity with California-grown fruits and vegetables and boost consumption of California specialty crops among 10,000 school-aged children through a farm-to-school Harvest of the Month (HOTM) program in Butte, Glenn, Colusa, and Tehama Counties. Through this program, students will take part in monthly tastings of featured produce and learn about local agriculture through Farmer of the Month (FOTM) highlights.	$500,000.00
Specialty Crops: Growing Health and Wealth in Classrooms and Community	Berkeley	**Common Vision** will conduct an educational project benefiting West Oakland. This project will increase knowledge of how to procure, produce, and prepare specialty crops by connecting cooks, food vendors, school nutrition staff, and teachers with producers; creating monthly pop-up markets and introducing older youth to food and farming career pathways.	$499,890.00
Groundwater and Specialty Crops: Success for Growers Under Changing Water Conditions	Davis	The **Community Alliance with Family Farmers (CAFF)** will conduct a project providing training for specialty crop farmers to understand and apply Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) requirements in their region and on their farms. The project will be conducted through a combination of one-on-one farmer technical assistance, distribution of educational materials, and interactive workshops to specialty crop growers around the state in groundwater-dependent regions in California.	$499,987.00
Building a Rapid Response Framework for Fresh Produce Growers	Woodland	The **Center for Produce Safety (CPS)** will partner with the University of Arizona to conduct a project that develops and pilots a rapid response network framework to train and mobilize multidisciplinary expertise and standardized protocols within 48 hours of confirmed foodborne pathogen detection. CPS will partner with the University of Arizona to develop and pilot this framework, which is expected to develop or enhance at least one new prevention, detection, control, or intervention practice mitigating food safety risks.	$395,947.00
Artificial Intelligence Discovery of Salmonella Sequence Targets Predicting Outbreak Risk in Agricultural Waters	Woodland	**Center for Produce Safety (CPS)** will conduct a project that supports California's specialty crop farmers statewide by using artificial intelligence analytics to improve risk profiling of Salmonella detections in agricultural water based on gene sequence targets. This project will test whether large sequence datasets, combined with environmental context (e.g., season, location, and rainfall), can identify genetic markers from those linked to human illness.	$190,026.00
Bacterial Pathogen Control in Recirculated Hydroponic Systems via Lytic Bacteriophage and Air Nanobubbles	Woodland	**Center for Produce Safety (CPS)** will conduct a project that evaluates non-chemical treatments to control bacterial pathogens in hydroponic systems. This project explores a new two-part approach using natural viruses called bacteriophages (which attack bacteria, not plants or people) combined with air nanobubbles to control bacterial pathogens in commercial-scale hydroponic operations.	$73,051.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Single-Step Chlorine-Charged Roller Brushes to Mitigate Microbial Cross-Contamination in Stone Fruit Packinghouses	Woodland	**Center for Produce Safety (CPS)** will conduct a project that tests a practical, low-cost approach to develop self-sanitizing brushes using a single-step chlorine treatment to mitigate or reduce microbial cross-contamination in stone fruit packinghouses.	$70,457.00
A Systems Approach to Minimizing Pathogen Persistence in Soils Through Functional Microbiome Prediction	Woodland	**Center for Produce Safety (CPS)** will conduct a project that identifies agricultural practices that can support the reduction of pathogen persistence in soil. The project will develop a predictive framework and soil indicators that can be used to make data-informed risk management decisions. The teams will conduct research activities including isolating RNA and DNA from soil samples and conducting metagenome analysis.	$480,307.00
Granular Activated Carbon for Low-Cost Passive Sampling of Anthroponotic Microbial Hazards in Agricultural Water Sources	Woodland	**Center for Produce Safety (CPS)** will conduct a project that develops and validates a low-cost sampler and rapid field test for human-specific fecal markers in agricultural water. This project will enable working farms to make more accurate assessments of the risks posed by human sewage contamination in pre-harvest agricultural waters.	$351,391.00
Evaluating Commercial Phage Formulations and Delivery Strategies for Microbial Risk Reduction in CEA Production	Woodland	**Center for Produce Safety (CPS)**, in partnership with Washington State University, will conduct a project that evaluates bacteriophages as a targeted, non-chlorine and crop-compatible antimicrobial approach in controlled-environment agriculture (CEA) systems. The project will assess stability, antimicrobial performance, and dosing requirements for commercially available bacteriophage products under realistic hydroponic operating conditions.	$75,940.00
Operational and Procedural Steps Needed to Enhance Pathogen Detectability Through Statistical Predictive Modeling and Industry Protocols	Woodland	**Center for Produce Safety (CPS)** will conduct a project to improve the reliability of pre-shipping pathogen testing for leafy greens. This project will define practical, implementable pre-shipping steps that improve the reliability of negative test results.	$316,964.00
Increasing Access to Specialty Crops and Expanding Specialty Crop Production and Distribution	Bishop	**Eastern Sierra Farm Fresh (ESFF)** will host workshops and outreach focused on production practices, market readiness, and stronger community engagement in Inyo and Mono Counties. Expected outcomes include higher engagement, improved crop reliability, increased local crop availability, and clearer data for distribution.	$247,348.00
EGE Out! Taproots Initiative	Sacramento	**EGE Foundation** will run a project delivering programming in Sacramento County through EGE Out! After School Program, focusing on specialty crop production, sustainable growing practices, soil health, water efficiency, and food systems. The project will pilot an urban agriculture curriculum co-developed with partner Sacramento Uganda Ministry Network and local farm organizations and growers from the Del Paso Heights, Oak Park, and South Sacramento communities.	$249,900.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Sublethal Heat Exposure and Developmental Effects in Codling Moth: Risks for Integrated Pest Management Programs	Statewide	**M3 Consulting Group, LLC**, will lead a project to better manage the codling moth's damage to California apples, benefiting California's apple growers statewide. The project intends to guide growers in adjusting management, reducing losses, and sustaining more resilient apple production.	$112,629.00
Fueling Health: Educating Retail Registered Dietitians to Share the Benefits of California Processing Fruits	Lodi	**Pacific Coast Producers** will launch an outreach campaign to equip registered dietitians (RDs) statewide and in other states with the tools and education needed to effectively share the benefits of consuming processed peaches and pears from California. Activities include nutrition and consumer research supporting the creation of a supermarket RD toolkit, cooking demos and workshops, dietitian education, and an educational campaign to ensure broad reach.	$482,505.00
Defending Market Share – Elevating Paso Wine in Key Metros	Paso Robles	**Paso Robles Wine Country Alliance (PRWCA)** will conduct a project in the Central Coast region to support defending and strengthening market share in established metropolitan markets where trade, buyers, and high-value consumers influence placement and purchasing decisions. This project will engage decision makers through targeted in-market activations, Paso Robles immersion experiences, and geotargeted digital support tied to these efforts.	$447,459.00
Improving Specialty Crop Resilience in Pauma Valley through Soil and Water Management	Pauma Valley	The **Pauma Band of Mission Indians** will conduct a project that aims to improve water use, soil health, and specialty crop yield through the adoption of data-driven irrigation and soil management practices	$249,858.00
Inland Empire Grown for Building Markets and Consumer Awareness for California Specialty Crops	Davis	The **Regents of the University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources** will conduct a project that supports California's specialty crop farmers in the Inland Empire Region. This project provides educational resources to expand consumer knowledge through multilingual campaigns and school-based education; train farmers to apply California Grown branding; rebuild trust through a farmer-led aggregation initiative; and publish an *Inland Empire Grown Guide* mapping local producers and market opportunities to small and low-resource producers.	$454,424.00
Epidemiology and Control of the Invasive Red Leaf Blotch Disease of Almond	Davis	This **Regents of the University of California, Davis** project will support specialty crop farmers statewide by testing biological control products in the field and developing local disease management guidelines for Red Leaf Blotch (RLB) that provide growers with alternatives to toxic fungicide chemicals.	$489,192.00
Valorization of Almond Hulls into a Valuable Feed Additive for Sustainable Cattle Production	Davis	The **Regents of the University of California, Davis,** will conduct a project that uses a probiotic from almond hulls to produce a shelf-stable feed supplement that aims to reduce methane emissions from calves. This project also addresses the priority of developing strategies and tools to help specialty crop farmers reduce storage limitations and convert their byproduct into a high-value additive – improving economic returns for the almond industry.	$487,742.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Estimating Reference Evapotranspiration from Limited Meteorological Data Using Machine Learning in the Central Valley	Davis	The **Regents of the University of California, Davis** aim to build machine learning models to estimate daily evapotranspiration data to bypass the need for relative humidity and dew point sensors from California Irrigation Management Information System (CIMIS) stations. By doing so, the project ensures specialty crop growers retain reliable irrigation guidance should the traditional infrastructure fail.	$140,940.00
Innovative Vineyards for Enhancing the Food-Energy-Water Nexus	Davis	The **Regents of the University of California, Davis** project plans to enhance the economic and environmental sustainability of grape production by optimizing how retractable photovoltaic system (RPVS) structures are designed to protect crops and reduce unnecessary evapotranspiration, with a goal to enhance resource use, crop performance, and fruit quality.	$498,726.00
Expanding Consumer Knowledge and Awareness of California Specialty Crops Through Food Preservation Education	Davis	The **Regents of the University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources** will conduct a project to expand consumer awareness and consumption of California specialty crops by providing research-based food preservation educational events via the University of California Master Food Preserver Program.	$498,841.00
Stacking Organic Amendment Combinations to Optimize Nutrient Management and Soil Health in Olives	Davis	The **Regents of the University of California, Davis**, will conduct a project that supports California's organic olive growers statewide by optimizing amendment combinations for their ability to provide crop nutrients and increase soil organic matter as well as improving biological soil health indicators. Success will be measured through the ability of each practice to reduce organic fertilization costs and improve organic matter. Results will be shared through grower outreach.	$380,440.00
Development of Analytical and Mitigation Tools for Grapes and Wine Affected by Wildfire Smoke Exposure	Davis	The **Regents of the University of California, Davis**, will conduct a project to assess negative impacts of wildfire smoke on the grape and wine sector. The project will research how volatile phenols compromise fruit quality and cause “smoke taint” that reduces crop value, by 1) developing rapid, high-throughput analytical assays with expanded diagnostic analyte coverage; 2) mapping grape enzyme activities during smoke exposure; and evaluating the efficacy of novel absorbents during winemaking to reduce smoke expression.	$499,990.00
Release and On-Farm Testing of New Spinach Open-Pollinated Cultivars	Davis	The **Regents of the University of California, Davis**, will develop a spinach breeding program to produce experimental varieties of spinach that have broad-spectrum resistance to downy mildew and that produce well under reduced nitrogen fertilization.	$485,415.00
Early Detection and Risk of Fusarium Dieback-Invasive Shothole Borers Threatening California Specialty Tree Crops	Davis	The **Regents of the University of California, Davis**, will conduct a project in Northern California to develop new tools to detect, eradicate, and control pests and diseases threatening local fruit and almond trees, including invasive plant and pest species, and enhancing the speed and reliability of detection methods. The team will develop a field-based loop-mediated isothermal amplification (LAMP) assay that detects the species-specific *Fusarium* symbionts in plant tissue or beetle specimens, identifying the attacking ISHB species even when beetles are absent or morphologically indistinguishable.	$460,552.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Creation of Hydrogels and Pelletized Biochar from Almond Byproducts for Water Conservation and Slow Nutrient Release in Soil	Davis	The **Regents of the University of California, Davis**, will conduct a project that converts almond hulls and shells into hydrogels and pelletized biochar that can be easily applied to soils for healthy soil and other environmental benefits. This project addresses growers' needs by creating pelletized biochar and hydrogels that can improve soil health, sequester carbon, and improve water holding capacity, therefore achieving sustainable specialty crop production. Applying pelletized biochar and hydrogels to soils can increase nutrient use efficiency, reduce leaching of nitrate, and thus improve quality of groundwater.	$451,049.00
Defining Optimal Irrigation Needs for Young Super-High-Density Olive Orchards	Davis	This **Regents of the University of California, Davis** project will quantify the water requirements of super-high-density young olive orchards using a lysimeter to measure evapotranspiration. This more accurate method will support the development and online release of a young-olive evapotranspiration calculator and track new-knowledge adoption.	$413,096.00
Assembly of Phage Libraries for Sustainable Management of Xylella fastidiosa in California Stone Fruits	Riverside	The **Regents of the University of California, Riverside** will conduct research on stone fruit trees and collect helpful viruses called phages from inside the plants. These phages will target the harmful bacterium of Xylella fastidiosa (*Xf),* helping growers manage this disease and protect orchard productivity.	$493,732.00
Improving the Tolerance of California Citrus Cultivars to Huanglongbing Disease Using Gene Editing	Riverside	This **Regents of the University of California, Riverside** project aims to introduce tolerance to Huanglongbing (HLB), a bacterial disease impacting commercial citrus, into citrus cultivars widely grown in California, including Washington navel orange, Tango mandarin, and Lisbon lemon to reduce crop loss.	$442,199.00
Building Capacity in California Leafy Greens Safety: Root Cause Analysis Training for Growers and Professionals	Riverside	The **Regents of the University of California, Riverside** will train a cadre of in-state trainers and support growers through bilingual (English/Spanish) produce safety training, with case-based learning and a technical assistance program. This training will support California's leafy-greens industry statewide to combat outbreaks that threaten public health, market confidence, and regulatory compliance.	$473,214.00
Bio-based Spray for Wildfire Prevention in California Specialty Crop Orchards	Riverside	The **Regents of the University of California, Riverside** will develop and evaluate a bio-based fire-retardant spray for proactive seasonal application using existing farm spray equipment. The goal is to help protect California specialty crop orchards, including avocado, citrus, and grape crops that are increasingly threatened by wildfires.	$499,952.00
Field-Deployable Platform for Rapid Lysis, Nucleic Acid Extraction, and Disease Diagnosis	Riverside	The **Regents of the University of California, Riverside**, will develop a portable "home test" device that allows growers and inspectors to perform quick, high-throughput, on-site nucleic acid extraction and detection. This platform will greatly speed up disease and pest detection that impacts citrus and specialty crops, enabling effective containment strategies.	$407,618.00
Artificial Intelligence-Based Surveillance of Unregulated Online Citrus Plant Trade for Pest and Disease Prevention	Riverside	The **Regents of the University of California, Riverside**, will develop an artificial intelligence-based surveillance platform to monitor and detect unregulated online sales of citrus plant material, preventing a key pathway for pest and disease spread. This project aims to close a critical gap in pest reporting, prevention, and risk management while tackling the challenge of electronic commerce and unregulated plant material.	$467,128.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Finalizing Three Integrated Pest Management Tools for Controlling Invasive Sap-Sucking Pests in Citrus Orchards	Riverside	The **Regents of the University of California, Riverside**, Department of Entomology, will lead a project that supports enhancing the speed and reliability of detection methods for pests. The project will optimize and scale three Integrated Pest Management tools: hydrogel ant baits, insectary plantings, and automated infra-red ant sensors, through development of a mass-production system for hydrogel ant baits, multi-site field trials, and outreach.	$387,972.00
Increasing the Production Efficiency and Sustainability of Citrus Nurseries Using Metabolic Models	Riverside	The **Regents of the University of California, Riverside**, will conduct a project that aims to enable reductions in fertilizer and water use by combining biochar and model-designed light and nutrient amendments to accelerate nursery tree production. The project will increase production efficiency, profitability, and sustainability for 250 California citrus nurseries and reduce their need for costly additional resources.	$498,538.00
RootEd: Training for California Specialty Crop Procurement in Schools	Truckee	**RootEd, Inc.** will conduct a project that helps address persistent barriers that prevent small- and mid-sized specialty crop producers from accessing institutional markets throughout California. This project includes delivering a free, dual-track online course with practical lessons, tools, templates, and technical assistance for both specialty crop farmers and school food buyers.	$495,256.00
Leveraging Olympic Timing to Reach Domestic and Global Consumers, Driving Wine Sales and Visitation for Santa Barbara County	Santa Barbara County	The **Santa Barbara Vintners Association (SBV)** will run an advertising campaign that promotes Santa Barbara County wine country's close proximity to Los Angeles and Southern California. The project will leverage exposure to the 2028 Los Angeles Olympic and Paralympic Games with a multi-year marketing and public relations campaign.	$499,845.00
Driving Wine Country Visitors to Strengthen Sonoma's Winegrape Market	Santa Rosa	The **Sonoma County Winegrape Commission (SCW)** will conduct a project to support California's specialty crop farmers in Sonoma County by launching a multi-channel campaign to drive tourism to local tasting rooms through consumer research, targeting nearby drivable markets, and drawing visitors from fly-in markets with direct flights to the region to propel high-value sales needed to preserve this leading specialty crop industry.	$497,622.00
Accelerating the Winegrape Farm of the Future through Agricultural Technology Incubation Technical Assistance and Training	Santa Rosa	The **Sonoma County Grape Growers Foundation** will conduct a project that develops a revolutionary Farm-of-the-Future incubation lab with the non-profit Reservoir Farms to speed needed winegrape technology development.	$397,195.00
Specialty Crops in Action: Nutrition, Cooking, and Farm-to-Community Connections	Los Angeles	The **Sustainable Economic Enterprises of Los Angeles** will deliver 220 bilingual, hands-on, youth and adult nutrition classes and support 574 specialty crop-focused video lessons at educational sites across Los Angeles. Participants will learn specialty crop seasonality, preparation, and nutrition to strengthen familiarity, build demand for specialty crops, and increase long-term purchasing intent while connecting communities to specialty crop growers.	$492,503.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Using Artificial Intelligence and Storytelling to Redefine Shelf-Stable Tomato Consumption	Sacramento	The **Tomato Products Wellness Council** will lead a project supporting California's specialty crop farmers by conducting a consumer research and marketing campaign to promote tomatoes to Generation Z consumers. Activities include consumer research surveys and focus groups to inform messaging development; a website redesign with Artificial Intelligence integration; and a marketing campaign leveraging videos, social media influencers, registered dietitians, and tradeshow attendance.	$496,244.00
Scaling Organic Farm-to-School Partnerships to Expand Healthy Specialty Crop Access for California Students	Sausalito	**Turning Green** will conduct a project that connects specialty crop growers with 15 public school districts, expanding access to healthy, California-grown produce for over 150,000 students. The goals of the project include, 1) increasing procurement of organic specialty crops by school kitchens; 2) strengthening farmer-school partnerships; and 3) building long-term institutional demand for California-grown organic produce by providing technical assistance, culinary trainings, and student education through taste tests and Harvest of the Month programs.	$247,925.00
Development of Stress-Tolerant Interspecific Hybrid Tomatoes and their Clonal Propagation Through Seed	Davis	This **University of California, Davis** project will develop stress-tolerant interspecific tomato hybrids. These hybrids will be used for both cultivation and rootstocks, and to develop strategies and tools to enable their clonal production through seed.	$485,058.00
Management and Prevention of Cotton Seed Bug in Ornamental Nursery Operations	Riverside	The **University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources and the University of California, Riverside** will conduct a project primarily in Southern California that investigates methods to mitigate and manage the invasive cotton seed bug (CSB) in ornamental nursery operations. The project goal is to develop mitigation strategies to reduce CSB infestation risk and establish management protocols.	$499,655.00
Sterile Insect Technique for Psyllids - Does Sterilizing Radiation Also Affect Vector Competency?	Riverside	The **University of California, Riverside** will conduct a project evaluating the sterile insect technique as a management tool to contain Asian citrus psyllid and protect California's $7.1 billion citrus industry statewide.	$290,811.00
Leveraging Eucalyptus Biochar to Retain Soil Nitrogen and Improve Conventional and Organic Leafy Greens Productivity	Seaside	The **University Corporation at Monterey Bay** will conduct a project on the Central Coast of California that will evaluate the impact of locally produced high-carbon eucalyptus biochar applied on leafy greens under conventional and organic management. This project will develop biochar best management practices information that growers can use to improve soil nitrogen retention.	$333,191.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Incorporating Monitoring and Predictive Modeling to Improve the Agricultural Ecosystem for Leafy Greens	Irvine	**Western Growers Association** will conduct a project that supports California's specialty crop farmers and stakeholders statewide by developing a dynamic science-based framework that incorporates environmental data and new technologies to actively characterize agricultural ecosystem conditions, adding depth to food safety monitoring while also improving land availability and public health outcomes. These tools will generate actionable insights into regional microbiological dynamics, support the development of foundational predictive models, and enable evaluation of the economic impacts of enhanced verification. The project will strengthen risk-based food safety decision-making, reinforce California's leadership in fresh produce food safety, and introduce first-of-its-kind ecosystem monitoring to optimize California's Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement metrics.	$200,017.00
Project One Voice: Building Consumers for California Wine through a Unified Marketing Campaign	Sacramento	**The Wine Institute** will conduct a project that supports California's specialty crop farmers by launching a unified, statewide, and industry-wide initiative to introduce and build affinity for California wine among U.S. consumers between the ages of 25 and 45 through asset creation, grower education, and social media outreach.	$500,000.00

COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $930,201.00 ● Number of Subawards: 13

The Colorado Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 10 research projects, 2 education and outreach projects, and 1 project that crosses more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including grapes, melons, onions, peaches, peppers, pinto beans, potatoes, and other fruits and vegetables throughout the State of Colorado.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Strategies for Revenue Diversification and Climate Resilience: Winter High Tunnel Growing and Perennial Berry Production Trials at Cloud City Farm	Leadville	**Cloud City Conservation Center** will research and trial two strategies to increase diversified year-round income for Colorado's specialty crop growers: winter high tunnel vegetable production and perennial berry production. This project will research and trial winter high tunnel vegetable growing best practices, including cold-hardy crops/varieties; planting and harvesting dates; temperature data and row cover use; pest and disease management; and cost analyses of winter tunnel production. Results will be shared with other specialty crop growers around the state through written publications, conference presentations, and workshops.	$37,561.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Post-harvest Management of Potato Dry Rot Disease in the San Luis Valley, Colorado	Monte Vista	**Colorado Potato Administrative Committee** and Colorado State University will develop a post-harvest management program for potato dry rot caused by Fusarium species in Colorado. Postharvest tuber treatments with conventional and biological fungicides will be evaluated for their effectiveness in managing potato dry rot in storage. Effective treatments will be identified and used to develop science-based management recommendations to potato growers in the San Luis Valley, Colo.	$91,683.00
Growing Year-Round: Expanding Specialty Crop Markets through Community Retail & Aggregation Hubs	Fort Collins	**Colorado State University** will evaluate whether year-round, producer-centered retail markets in at least three communities across Colorado can increase consumer purchasing, access, and local production of Colorado specialty crops. This project will evaluate whether these retail farm stops can increase specialty crop consumption, improve producer income, and expand wholesale access, while providing a replicable framework for other Colorado communities that cannot support a standalone food hub.	$74,993.00
UAV-Based Precision Monitoring of Soil Moisture and its Impact on the Quality of High-Value Specialty Crops	Fort Collins	**Colorado State University** will conduct a research project using Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) remote sensing technology to evaluate potential moisture stress in various high-value specialty crops, including cantaloupe, onions, and peppers. This work aims to provide a tool to assist producers in maintaining field wide quality for specialty crop fruit and bulb production. The efficacy of UAV remote sensing, along with other remote sensing tools such as soil moisture sensors and thermal imagery, will be examined for its ability to quickly and efficiently monitor the potential for moisture stress in high value crops.	$69,880.00
Integrating Pollinator-Preferred Varieties and the Agricultural Landscape to Increase Chile Pepper Pollination, Yield, and Grower Profitability	Fort Collins	**Colorado State University** will combine on-farm sampling and field experiments to provide growers with guidance on how to increase insect pollination of chile peppers on their farms and identify chile pepper varieties that deliver a large yield boost when pollinated by insects. This project will conduct experiments to quantify the effects of insect pollination on chili pepper yield in the five most commonly grown varieties, and to intensively sample farms to figure out the nesting and primary feeding locations of the native bees that are the most important pollinators.	$83,619.00
Strengthening Food Safety, Outbreak Response, and Market Access for Specialty Crop Growers through Root Cause and Risk Assessment Training	Fort Collins	**Colorado State University** will strengthen food safety practices, outbreak response, and risk-based decision-making among specialty crop growers in Colorado through applied root cause analysis and risk assessment training. This project will deliver in-person, hands-on workshops tailored to key specialty crops, including cantaloupe, onions, peppers, carrots, and tree fruit.	$77,494.00
Passive Solar Dehydration as a Sustainable Approach for Potato Cull Management	Fort Collins	**Colorado State University** will lead the implementation of a low-cost passive solar-drying system to process potato culls, followed by a feasibility study for phytochemical extraction. The findings will guide the selection of scalable, resource-efficient extraction methods suitable for commercial or on-farm use.	$64,348.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Novel Storage Extension Technology for the Colorado Peach Industry	Fort Collins	**Colorado State University** will test novel technology under real-world conditions for peach post-harvest handling to optimize supply chain logistics of this high-value crop. The project will test rapid and effective methodologies of post-harvest treatment applications under ambient atmosphere or low pressure that can extend the storage and shelf life of stone fruits without the risk of storage disorders. Through close collaboration with peach growers, researchers will translate current and project-generated information into educational materials and programs.	$68,027.00
Evaluation of Jujube as an Alternative Specialty Crop for the Western Slope of Colorado	Fort Collins	**Colorado State University** (CSU) will investigate and evaluate seven varieties of jujube as a viable specialty crop for the western slope of Colorado. Work will generate critical information on overall jujube viability, tree vigor, yields, consumer taste preference, fruit quality, annual input requirements, and labor needs that specialty crop producers will need in deciding whether to adopt a jujube enterprise into their operations. Project information will be disseminated at regional workshops, annual reports, and a CSU Extension fact sheet.	$49,930.00
Feasibility of POST-Applied Zidua in Pinto Bean Programs: Impacts on Palmer Amaranth Control and Variety-Specific Crop Response	Fort Collins	**Colorado State University** will evaluate POST-applied Zidua (pyroxasulfone) crop safety and variety tolerance when tank-mixed with pinto bean growers' standard POST herbicide programs (Varisto, Outlook POST). This work aims to address the critical lack of long-residual Palmer amaranth infestation control options. This study will test Zidua safety across five commercial pinto bean varieties and eight realistic tank mixes at two locations. It will deliver clear "safe/unsafe" guidelines so farmers can confidently integrate Zidua POST without risking crop injury.	$49,535.00
Elevating Colorado Wine: Statewide Consumer Awareness and Insights Project	Broomfield	**Colorado Wine Industry Development Board** will boost the visibility of the Colorado Wine brand through a comprehensive marketing campaign that utilizes paid social media and public relations to increase consumer awareness to establish a robust regional identity and foster brand loyalty.	$39,500.00
AI Fruit Vision: Open-Source Crop Load Estimation for Western Colorado Orchards	Delta	**Delta Conservation District**, with three partner orchards and technology company support, will create an inexpensive multi-spectral camera system that provides accurate orchard crop load estimations for the fruit growers of Western Colorado. This project will adapt a free, open-source artificial intelligence (AI) vision model to process orchard imagery, enabling growers to improve harvest planning, optimize thinning decisions, and reduce economic losses from fruit perishability and inaccurate crop forecasts.	$33,577.50
Oaxacan Pepper Adaptation, Improvement & Adoption	Cortez	**Pueblo Seed & Food Co.** will work on the improvement, adaptation, and adoption of six varieties of mole peppers from the Oaxaca region of southern Mexico to make them commercially available in Colorado. Key activities: 1) obtain, improve, and increase seed supplies, 2) supply seed to commercial scale growers for trialing and adoption, and 3) develop up to three powdered mole products, and testing by restaurant and culinary professionals. The work will also include developing a food safety reference guide for handling, processing, and packaging the resulting products.	$35,500.00

CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $506,847.11 ● Number of Subawards: 4

The Connecticut Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 3 research projects and 1 marketing project to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including berries, cucurbits, apples, grapes (farm wine), fruits, vegetables, and greenhouse/nursery products throughout the State of Connecticut.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Identifying Volatiles that Attract Ganaspis Kimorum, a Larval Parasitoid of Spotted Wing Drosophila	New Haven	The **Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station** will identify and characterize chemical cues used by Ganaspis kimorum, a larval parasitoid that specifically attacks the invasive fruit pest spotted wing Drosophila (SWD, Drosophila suzukii) to improve biologically based pest management strategies for specialty crops such as strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, and cherries.	$99,291.35
CT Grown Connect: Digital Discovery Initiative for Specialty Crops in the Tri-State Region	Hartford	The **Connecticut Department of Agriculture** will conduct a multimedia marketing campaign to strengthen consumer awareness, visibility, and accessibility of Connecticut-grown specialty crops across the tri-state region. This will include updating the Connecticut Grown website and will feature specialty crops and project partners such as the Connecticut Farm Wine Development Council, Connecticut Apple Marketing Board, Maple Syrup Producers Association of Connecticut, and other specialty crop grower organizations.	$76,233.76
Evaluation of Mass Trapping Devices for Cucumber Beetle Management	Storrs	The **University of Connecticut** will conduct evaluations of striped cucumber beetles' traps to inform development of integrated pest management tactics. Project results will be disseminated through fact sheets and presentations to stakeholders.	$85,706.00
Suitable Rootstocks to Improve Tree Growth, Nutrient Uptake, Precocity, Yield, and Quality of Apples	Storrs	Researchers at the **University of Connecticut** Department of Plant Science will study the impact of apple rootstocks on the growth, leaf size, mineral concentrations, chlorophyll, and precocity of the scion cultivar under the climatic and soil conditions of Connecticut. The results will provide an excellent guideline for growers to choose suitable rootstocks in Connecticut to enhance fruit quality, yield, and market value.	$95,615.00

DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $402,128.63 ● Number of Subawards: 8

The Delaware Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 3 research projects, 3 education and outreach projects, and 2 projects that cross more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops, including lima beans, peas, watermelon, peaches, pumpkins, cantaloupes, edamame and lettuce throughout the State of Delaware.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Freeze Mitigation Evaluation in Orchards: Costs and Efficacy of Portable Burners vs. Fixed Wind Machines	Frankford	**Bennett Orchards** will lead a controlled, side-by-side study of mobile frost burners versus fixed wind machines to analyze and document the efficacy, variable and fixed costs, operational considerations, and relevant environmental and economic factors necessary to guide U.S. fruit growers with the incorporation of active frost protection strategies into their operations.	$35,642.00
Specialty Crop for Healthier Community - Farm to Kitchen Feeding Project	Sussex and Kent Counties	The **Boys & Girls Clubs of Delaware** will expand its Farm to Kitchen Nutrition and Agriculture Education Program to increase access to fresh, locally grown specialty crops and provide nutrition education for youth and families in Sussex and Kent counties. The project will increase consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, improve nutrition knowledge and healthy eating habits, and expand market opportunities for Delaware specialty crop producers.	$70,000.00
Freight Farm for Colonial School District	Newark	**Colonial School District** will establish and operate a controlled environment agriculture hydroponic production laboratory through using a modular vertical farm at William Penn High School. This project will expand production of locally grown produce to provide students with hands-on experience in controlled environment agriculture.	$70,000.00
From Page to Plate: Educating through Specialty Crop Ag-Mags	Camden	The **Delaware Farm Bureau** will develop and distribute Delaware-specific agricultural magazines that increase public awareness and understanding of specialty crops grown throughout the state. With on-farm photography, farmer interviews, educational articles, and interactive content, materials will highlight the people, products, and practices that make Delaware agriculture unique. Featured specialty crops may include lima beans, peas, apples, sweet corn, and other locally grown commodities.	$8,325.00
Lighting the Way for Lettuce: Development of a Low-Energy Indoor Hydroponic Lettuce Production System	Frankford	**Owens Premium Produce/Pure Starts, LLC**. will build and test a low-cost indoor hydroponic lettuce growing system inside a converted poultry house in Sussex County, Del. The project will focus on a three-tier hydroponic gutter system designed to lower startup costs and long-term operating costs for indoor specialty crop production. The project will ensure engagement with extension both for technical input and assistance with sharing project results with growers interested in this type of conversion.	$70,000.00
Investigating Wireworm Impact and Management in Watermelon	Newark	The **University of Delaware's Extension Entomology Program** will research potential new management strategies for wireworms, a common pest in Delaware watermelon production. The project will investigate new ways to manage wireworms by using insecticide-treated rye seed and utilize newly established commercial farm plots to evaluate wireworm populations and their impacts on melon fields.	$36,045.36
Bridging Biofumigant Gaps: Targeted Analysis of Glucosinolate Compounds for Management of Phytophthora Capsici in Cucurbits	Newark	The **University of Delaware's Department of Plant and Soil Sciences** will integrate laboratory and field-based approaches to establish thresholds to guide the use of biofumigant crops such as mustard to protect specialty crops from Phytophthora capsici, a highly destructive soilborne water mold that causes rot and blight on any part of a plant. The focus will be on cucurbit (gourd family), specifically watermelon and pumpkin. When biofumigant crops are terminated and incorporated into the soil at the right time, glucosinolates break down into isothiocyanates (ITCs) that have fungicidal and nematicidal properties, showing promise in controlling soilborne pathogens.	$45,969.03

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Exploring Microbial Inoculants to Improve Resilience and Reduce Nitrogen Fertilizer Dependence in Delaware's Legume Vegetables	Newark	The **University of Delaware's Department of Plant and Soil Sciences** will support Delaware's processing and fresh market vegetable growers with research-based information on the performance of new inoculant products containing nitrogen-fixing rhizobia and other beneficial microbes for legume vegetables like peas, snap beans, edamame, and lima beans.	$57,888.04

THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Funds Awarded to State: $288,736.67 ● Number of Subawards: 4

The Department of Energy & Environment Government of the District of Columbia will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The District's subawards include 4 education and outreach projects to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including leafy greens, honey, herbs, and fresh produce throughout the District of Columbia.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
School Garden Partners	DC	**City Blossoms** will establish at least two new gardens that will grow specialty crops, provide at least four annual coaching sessions to educators to support school and community awareness, and provide technical support to new partners on preparing specialty crops. Work will be conducted through the School Garden Partners program, which collaborates with DC elementary and middle schools to build and manage kid-driven gardens and green spaces. Resources include teaching how to grow, prepare, and eat fruits and vegetables; connect outdoor space to existing school curriculum; integrate specialty crop production, and consume more specialty crops in schools and wider surrounding residential communities at all income levels.	$78,887.00
DC Greens The Well at Oxon Run Specialty Crop Expansion Initiative	DC	**DC Greens**' community farm, The Well at Oxon Run, will increase specialty crop production capacity and access to fresh produce with this project. Work will include establishing year-round growing capacity through controlled environments, capturing rainwater, holding weekly harvest events, and delivering 20 workshops annually on nutrition and agriculture education.	$78,887.00
Hands-on Food Education that Builds Knowledge and Skills to Access, Prepare, and Enjoy Local Specialty Crops in Washington, DC Communities	DC	**FRESHFARM Markets, Inc.** will deliver nutrition education to five DC school sites to increase exposure and build familiarity and skills with locally grown specialty crops among students, families, and residents. This project will also combine hands-on food education, efficient local procurement and distribution, and point-of-sale skill-building to increase familiarity with, desire for, and access to local specialty crops across elementary schools, early childhood education communities, and farmers market settings.	$76,351.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Three Part Harmony Community Participation Program	DC	**Three Part Harmony Center for Agriculture, Food and Learning** will engage community members curious about farming and growing food to teach them about how to grow specialty crops and become more familiar with preparing and eating them at home, by creating a formal farm orientation system, providing training for key farm tasks, and offering regular volunteer hours. With an orientation and multiple three-hour workdays per season, each volunteer in the Community Participation Program will learn key skills such as preparing planting beds, using gardening tools, growing and harvesting techniques, compost management, and more.	$28,887.00

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES
Funds Awarded to State: $4,366,348.64 ● Number of Subawards: 19

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 14 research projects, 1 education and outreach project, 1 marketing project, and 3 projects that cross more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops, including mango, blueberries, sweet corn, and muscadine grapes throughout the State of Florida.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
From Market Signals to On-Farm Decision: A Florida Strawberry Pressure Index and Harvest-Shipping Playbook	Tallahassee	**Florida A&M University** will develop a Florida Strawberry Market Pressure Index (FSPI) and dashboard and a Harvest-Shipping Playbook to support Florida strawberry growers. This project aims to develop market decision-support tools and policy recommendations that enhance the competitiveness, profitability, and resilience of Florida-grown strawberries. The FSPI will convert timely market signals—including shipment volumes, competing-origin arrivals, movement data, and price information—into a practical harvest, shipping, routing, and quality-management decision dashboard. The Playbook will translate FSPI conditions into a Green/Yellow/Red rulebook (e.g., harvest acceleration or slowdown, routing adjustments, and pack/quality actions) and will be used to support training and technical assistance opportunities.	$218,132.00
"Fresh From Florida" Food Service Distributor Market Access Development	Tallahassee	The **Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services** will expand the "Fresh From Florida" (FFF) program by increasing market access opportunities for Florida specialty crop growers in the food service industry. New and existing food service distribution partners will promote Florida specialty crops through market access efforts and promotions. These promotions include digital and print promotions, such as website and social media advertising and features, custom digital content creation, newsletters, blog posts, and print fliers. This project will enable FFF to further develop programs that provide product and seasonality education to buyers and consumers, as well as increase purchases of Florida produce by the distributors' customers.	$157,407.45

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Developing a Machine Learning Model for the Nutrient and Heat Stress Monitoring Using Field and Remote Sensing Data in Florida Strawberries and Sweet Corn	Miami	**Florida International University** and partners will conduct research to develop and validate tools to improve heat and nutrient stress management in southern Florida strawberries and sweet corn. The project team will develop integrated sensor and machine learning-based models to assess relationships among plant physiological, nutritional, and growth responses under contrasting management conditions and heat stress.	$244,189.81
A Hybrid (Rotary Wing and Balloon) UAV for Enhanced Plant Imaging and Reduced Plant Disease Transmissions in Precision Specialty Crop Management	Orlando	The **University of Central Florida** and the University of Florida Gulf Coast Research and Education Center will custom design a hybrid unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) to reduce downwash speed—which leads to negative impacts on farm field management and increases chances of insect-mediated plant disease transmissions. A reconfigured "quadrotor" hover prototype will be housed inside of an in-house helium balloon. Experiments will help train students, inform potential further use, and if viable, support moving forward to commercialization that would provide a more efficient and labor- and cost-saving platform for farming operations.	$194,715.00
One South, Many Muscadines: Strengthening the Competitiveness of Florida Muscadines through Strategic Branding	Orlando	**University of Central Florida**, in collaboration with the Florida Wine and Grape Growers Association and Florida muscadine industry stakeholders, will conduct applied branding and market-positioning research on the competitiveness of Florida-grown muscadines. The project will evaluate two branding approaches—a regionally informed Southern muscadine identity and a Florida-specific differentiated identity—emphasizing Florida heritage, terroir, and agritourism experiences. Research activities will include stakeholder surveys, branding experiments, immersive digital engagement testing, and economic analysis to assess impacts on consumer awareness, brand equity, willingness to purchase, stakeholder coordination, and agritourism engagement.	$249,998.00
Evaluating Pollination Requirements, Planting Arrangements, and Pollen Movement for Increased Yields and Fruit Quality in Southern Highbush	Gainesville	The **University of Florida** will test and examine newly developed southern highbush blueberry cultivars for their self-pollination capabilities and pollen transport throughout fields. Researchers will determine the best cultivars to plant together for cross-pollination and develop planting design recommendations. This project will improve the production of southern highbush blueberries, the pollination requirements of newly developed cultivars, and the optimal field plantings to achieve pollination success, high yields, and increased fruit marketability.	$194,046.00
Improved Diagnostic Capacity for Strawberry Diseases Using Optimized and Multiplex DNA-Based Assays	Gainesville	**University of Florida** is developing ultra-sensitive diagnostic tests to detect Neopestalotiopsis, an emerging fungal genus that causes root rot and can spread unnoticed on strawberry transplants, devastate production fields, and persist for years once established. This project will deploy a rapid field diagnostic test for Neopestalotiopsis and will expand the platform to simultaneously detect other important strawberry pathogens, including Botrytis cinerea, Gnomonia comari, and Verticillium dahliae, providing broader value to growers in Florida and across the U.S.	$219,883.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Improving Fusarium Wilt Management in Florida Watermelon through Diagnosis, Variety Selection, and Targeted Management.	Gainesville	**University of Florida** will lead a research project to improve Fusarium wilt, a soilborne fungal disease, in Florida watermelon. Watermelon soil tests and evaluation will be conducted, including soil bioassays, in-season disease monitoring, replicated variety and planting-date trials, and evaluation of microbial and fungicide treatments. This project will improve grower decision-making by identifying Fusarium wilt risk, evaluating commercially relevant watermelon varieties under confirmed disease pressure, and assessing effective disease management strategies to reduce losses and improve yield. Results and targeted disease management practices and tools will be disseminated at workshops and field days.	$229,661.00
Identifying New Sterile, Non-invasive Lantana Cultivars for the Florida Nursery and Landscape Industry	Gainesville	**University of Florida** will address the critical need of the Florida nursery and landscape industry by evaluating the female fertility (seed production and germination) and male fertility (pollen viability) of 15 lantana cultivars. As lantana is listed as an invasive species in Florida, this project will assess the hybridization potential of native lantana to identify new sterile, non-invasive lantana cultivars for the Florida nursery and landscape industry and its customers. Successful hybridization may result in an exemption from the “No Use” assessment for newly identified sterile, non-invasive cultivars, and results will be disseminated to industry and the public.	$243,035.00
Improving Florida Edamame Profitability Through Variety Selection, Fertilization Strategies, and Integrated Pest Management	Gainesville	**University of Florida** will conduct field trails to evaluate and develop edamame production systems adapted to the subtropical conditions of Florida. The project will evaluate and assess production potential, crop yield, and pod quality of edamame varieties and their compatibility with mechanical harvest in South Florida. Grower-ready materials will be developed featuring the optimization of planting and fertility practices and integrated pest and disease management. Results and guidance materials will be disseminated to stakeholders through field days, publications, and digital education programs.	$246,581.00
Natural Products for Anthracnose Disease Control of Florida Avocados, Blueberries, and Mangoes	Gainesville	The **University of Florida** Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences and the Indian River Research and Education Center will develop microbial and natural antifungal products to control postharvest anthracnose, a fungal plant disease, in Florida-grown avocados, blueberries, and mangoes. The project will study the biocontrol agents' biology, identify active compounds, develop effective formulations, and evaluate their impact on fruit quality and shelf life. The resulting technologies will be disseminated to producers to reduce disease-related losses and improve economic returns for Florida's fruit industry.	$247,830.00
Biological Control of Silk Flies with Parasitic Wasps for Increased Sweet Corn Sustainability	Gainesville	**University of Florida** entomologists will conduct research focused on improving the management of corn silk flies (CSFs) through the release of natural enemies such as parasitic wasps, known as augmentative biological control. CSFs are the most severe pests infesting sweet corn in southern Florida. Florida producers will receive biological control tools on insect pest management that lower pest pressure before insecticide applications become necessary. Extension programming will be used to disseminate project results and associated CSF management recommendations.	$97,594.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Breeding Sun-Tolerant Hostas for Florida Production	Gainesville	**University of Florida** will lead a project to develop sun-tolerant Hosta (perennial plants) cultivars suitable for commercial production in Florida. The project will integrate conventional breeding, biotechnology, and molecular genetics to develop and evaluate new cultivars with enhanced tolerance to full sun and improved ornamental value. Production recommendations and germplasm resources for growers will be developed and disseminated through field day demonstrations.	$198,188.00
Developing Next-Generation Petunias with Enhanced Flower Size and Double-Flower Traits Using CRISPR Genome Editing	Gainesville	**University of Florida** will develop new petunia cultivars with enhanced flower size and semi-double or double-flower phenotypes using CRISPR genome editing technology. This project will target key genes controlling petal growth and floral organ identity to generate 20% to 30% larger flowers, convert stamens into petal-like organs, retain female fertility for seed production, and develop transgene-free edited lines through segregation and trait pyramiding. Results, featuring elite petunia germplasm with superior ornamental value and faster breeding pathways, will be delivered to Florida growers through publications, workshops, and extension activities.	$244,046.00
Improving Southern Corn Leaf Blight Control: Fungicide Efficacy Testing and Resistant Hybrids	Gainesville	**University of Florida** will improve sweet corn production by developing sustainable, science-based management strategies against southern corn leaf blight (SCLB), caused by destructive fungal plant pathogen Bipolaris maydis, in Florida. This project will evaluate fungicide performance, monitor fungicide resistance, and advance the development of SCLB-resistant sweet corn hybrids. Research findings will include updated fungicide recommendations; means to reduce unnecessary fungicide applications; and further development of SCLB-resistant hybrids that help protect yields and support the long-term sustainability of Florida sweet corn production. Findings will be shared through local, regional, and national outreach activities and publications.	$249,746.00
Improving Soil Health for Management of Disease Complex by Southern Blight and Root-Knot Nematodes in Vegetable Production	Gainesville	**University of Florida** will develop non-chemical strategies to combat and manage the devastating disease complex caused by southern blight (soil-borne fungal disease) and southern root-knot nematodes (parasitic plant-roundworm) in snap bean production. Researchers will develop and integrate microbial consortia with composts and cover crops to manage the disease complex and improve soil health in snap beans. Results will be disseminated to stakeholders through extension activities, including grower meetings and field days.	$248,557.00
Enhancing Florida Avocado Rootstocks: Addressing Phytophthora Threats, Grower Priorities, and Expanding Tolerant Germplasm for Grower Use	Gainesville	The **University of Florida** will conduct research to identify Phytophthora (water mold) tolerant avocado plants for use as potential rootstocks in Florida. By identifying tolerant avocado accessions, assessing cross-pathogen risks during grove transitions, and surveying established and potential growers about their current challenges, this project aims to fill critical knowledge gaps and support the development of resilient, data-driven strategies to sustain and grow Florida's avocado industry. Results will be shared with Florida avocado producers through extension events.	$230,134.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Integrated Pest Management Strategies to Mitigate the Spread and Economic Impact of the Two-Spot Cotton Leafhopper, an Emerging Threat to Florida Vegetable Production	Gainesville	**University of Florida** will protect the competitiveness and sustainability of Florida vegetable production by developing and delivering an integrated pest management (IPM) program for the invasive two-spotted cotton leafhopper (TSCL). This project will optimize field-ready sampling methods and determine the best detection protocols for TSCL across crop growth stages and seasons and identify insecticides and cultural practices, including fertilization, that effectively suppress TSCL populations and improve vegetable yield. Results will be translated into practical, science-based IPM guidelines and disseminated through workshops, field days, extension publications, and digital outreach programs to support sustainable pest management and reduce economic damage while conserving beneficial insect populations.	$242,724.00
Next-Generation Digital Scouting: Integrating Edge-AI for Autonomous Disease Management in Florida Strawberry Systems	Tampa	The **University of South Florida** will improve pest and disease control in Florida strawberries by developing an artificial intelligence (AI)-based disease detection model and a real-time, smartphone-based monitoring interface to identify early-stage fungal disease. This technology will reduce unnecessary field-wide applications while improving disease control, faster detection and treatment, helping growers protect yield, reducing input costs, and supporting transitions toward organic compatible practices and higher value markets. Results will be shared through workshops, field days, and extension publications.	$249,975.30

GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $1,782,664.36 ● Number of Subawards: 16

The Georgia Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 2 research projects, 9 education and outreach projects, 2 marketing projects, and 3 projects that cross more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including pecans, blueberries, peppers, strawberries, peaches, apples, Vidalia onions, and citrus fruits throughout the State of Georgia.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Positioning Georgia Grown Produce Sales to Expand Beyond the Southeast	LaGrange	The **Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association (GFVGA)** will work with the Georgia Department of Agriculture to coordinate specialty crop fruit and vegetable producers to exhibit in the Georgia Grown Pavillion at the 2026 International Floral and Produce Association's (IFPA) Global Produce and Floral Show (GPFS) in Orlando, Fla. These interactions will not only help growers expand their sales but also serve as a catalyst for building long-term relationships with new clients.	$92,893.00
Faces of the Farm: Driving Demand for Georgia Fruits and Vegetables Through Storytelling	LaGrange	**Georgia Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association** will produce short, engaging media content that introduces consumers to the growers behind Georgia's fruits and vegetables. These authentic stories, shared through digital media, video, and a visual storytelling website, will bring about a human element to the fruit and vegetable industry, increase awareness of Georgia's specialty crops, and strengthen the connection between farmers and consumers.	$98,754.72

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Enhancing Specialty Crop Competitiveness Through Advancing Precision Agriculture and Producer Education	LaGrange	**Georgia Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association** will coordinate the 2027 Southeast Regional Fruit & Vegetable Conference to advance the competitiveness of specialty crop producers by expanding the applied technology focus of the event. In addition to updated educational sessions, the conference will debut Innovation Row where growers, packers, and shippers can directly engage with precision agriculture and ag-technology companies through hands-on demonstrations. The 2027 conference will strengthen the connection between research, innovation, and on-farm implementation by bringing together leading suppliers and service providers serving specialty crop producers and demonstrating scalable solutions tailored to southeastern specialty crop production.	$150,737.00
Increase Sales and Competitiveness of Georgia Pecans through Georgia Pecan Restaurant Week	Tifton	The **Georgia Pecan Growers Association (GPGA)** will implement a targeted, statewide marketing initiative designed to increase consumer demand, drive sales, and enhance the overall competitiveness of Georgia pecans. By elevating awareness in high-impact metropolitan markets, this project will create downstream economic benefit for pecan growers, shellers, and industry stakeholders across Georgia.	$47,000.00
Increase Best Practices in Pecan Production Through Education and Access	Perry	**Georgia Pecan Growers Association** will plan and execute the 2027 Annual Conference and Trade Show, a three-day educational event to be held in Perry, Ga., at the Georgia National Fairgrounds. The conference will provide Georgia pecan growers with access to research-based education and best management practices to improve orchard productivity, regulatory compliance, and long-term profitability.	$69,096.00
Advancing Food Safety Readiness for Georgia Specialty Crop Producers	Forest Park	The **Grow Kit Collective** will lead a statewide initiative to advance food safety readiness among Georgia specialty crop producers through applied education and on-farm implementation support. Through a partnership with Fort Valley State University, the Georgia Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association, and the Georgia Grown Resource Centers, the project will deliver a coordinated program for approximately 40 small and medium specialty crop producers to strengthen record keeping, improve operational practices, and build readiness for future compliance and market requirements.	$100,000.00
Propagation Technology for Pecan Trees Using In-vitro Methods Based on Bioreactors and A Novel Planting System	Atlanta	**University of Georgia Griffin**, in collaboration with Georgia Tech (GT), will establish a method for propagation of valuable pecan cultivars using bioreactor technology and a planting system available at GT. In vitro shoot multiplication, a tissue culture method, could provide growers with many plants much faster than conventional grafting. The results will be disseminated to stakeholders through grower meetings and visits to farms.	$99,360.00
Developing A Diagnostic Assay for Irregular Ripening and Fruit Quality Decline Disorder in Blueberry in Georgia	Athens	**University of Georgia** will conduct a two-year study to investigate an unidentified disorder affecting Georgia's $450 million blueberry industry, marked by irregular ripening, premature softening, and fruit splitting. Researchers will use conventional pathogen detection methods and high-throughput sequencing to pinpoint viral, bacterial, or fungal causes, then develop rapid diagnostic tools for early field detection.	$99,935.90

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Screening Pepper Germplasm for Multi Species Thrip Resistance to Support Sustainable Pepper Production in Georgia and the Southeast U.S.	Athens	**University of Georgia** has developed a unique pepper germplasm resource consisting of approximately 500 accessions, known as the UGA-CAPSI-CORE collection, to support applied research for improving pepper productivity in Georgia and the Southeast U.S. This project will identify pepper lines that are resistant to thrips that can be directly utilized in applied breeding and integrated pest management programs.	$99,694.00
Finding the Sweet Spot: Nitrogen Fertility and Cultivar Selection for Georgia Strawberry Growers	Athens	The **University of Georgia** Horticulture and Plant Pathology Departments will address the need for information on cultivar selection and fertilizer strategies for conventional and organic strawberry producers in Georgia. This project will test at least six cultivars in both conventional and organic production systems and identify plant performance, disease susceptibility, plant yield, and berry quality to aid in farmer cultivar selection and management.	$99,715.00
Management of Invasive Two-Spot Cotton Leafhopper on Specialty Crops	Griffin	**University of Georgia** will develop research-based information on the two-spot cotton leafhopper, a major invasive pest of vegetables (okra and eggplant) and container ornamental nursery production in Georgia. Because of its recent introduction, key factors such as host range and interactions with its current and other prospective hosts remain to be examined. This project will determine the pest's host range, map its dispersal patterns, identify factors contributing to its establishment in Georgia, and evaluate various cultural and chemical tactics for effective management.	$96,322.00
Low-Cost Antimicrobial Edible Coating to Reduce Postharvest Decay and Increase Marketable Yield of Georgia Peaches	Athens	**University of Georgia** will enhance the competitiveness of Georgia-grown peaches by developing and validating a low-cost antimicrobial edible coating designed to reduce postharvest decay and increase marketable yield. This project will develop a packinghouse-compatible edible coating formulated from food-grade polysaccharides such as chitosan and alginate.	$99,997.00
FloraLens: An Image-Text-Powered Interactive AI Application for Scouting, Management Recommendations, and Enhancing Grower Knowledge and Awareness	Athens	**University of Georgia** will develop FloraLens, an innovative and interactive AI application that combines computer vision with a large language model to improve the diagnosis of major and similar symptomatic leaf spot diseases in ornamentals, while also providing management recommendations and strengthening growers' understanding and confidence in using AI technologies for disease management.	$99,956.00
Building Resilience for the Georgia Apple Industry: Evaluation of Disease Resistance, Fruit Quality, and Storability of Southern Heirloom Apple Cultivars through Research and Extension Activities	Athens	**University of Georgia** will strengthen the resilience and competitiveness of Georgia's apple industry by evaluating heirloom apples for disease resistance, fruit quality and storability, and by delivering research-based outreach through extension programs to growers and stakeholders. These efforts will expand market opportunities by diversifying varieties and will help reduce production risks while meeting consumer demand for high-quality, sustainably grown fruit.	$99,996.90

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Strengthening Retail Visibility and Measuring Market Impact for Vidalia Onions	Vidalia	The **Vidalia Onion Committee** will establish an agreement with the Georgia Department of Agriculture to strengthen the retail competitiveness of Georgia Grown Vidalia onions through a two-year, data driven retail visibility and performance measurement project. The expected outcome is improved visibility for Georgia Grown Vidalia onions and measurable sales growth within participating retail locations.	$47,115.24
Survey and Identification of Citrus Canker–Associated Xanthomonas to Improve Disease Preparedness in Georgia Citrus Production	Valdosta	**Valdosta State University** will enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of citrus production in Georgia by improving citrus canker preparedness through voluntary survey and identification of citrus canker associated Xanthomonas. Outcomes from this project will provide Georgia citrus growers with science-based information to improve disease awareness, support citrus variety selection, and strengthen citrus canker preparedness in Georgia citrus production systems.	$96,865.30

GUAM DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $293,307.17 ● Number of Subawards: 1

The Guam Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by making a significant FY2026 subaward related to honey research.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Island Breeze to Honeybees: An Integrated Approach to Expanding Honey Production by Improving Beekeeping Practices, Assessing Honey Flow, and Managing Greater Banded Hornet, Vespa Tropica on Guam	Guam	The **University of Guam** and the Guam Beekeepers Association will characterize seasonal honey flow patterns and identify peak nectar foraging periods to inform apiary management practices to beekeepers in Guam. Relatedly, the project will address the predation pressure of greater banded hornet, Vespa tropica, on managed honeybee colonies—implementing evidence-based trapping methods and evaluating the efficacy of hornet traps in apiaries.	$260,162.59

HAWAII DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $618,260.68 ● Number of Subawards: 9

The Hawaii Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 1 research project, 6 education and outreach projects, and 2 marketing projects to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including maile, casava, and cacao throughout the State of Hawaii.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Best of Hawaii: Elevating Hawaii Coffee to the World through a Competitive Showcase	Kailua-Kona	The **Hawaii Coffee Association** (HCA) will conduct a project elevating Hawaii coffee to the global specialty market through a competitive showcase and promotion. The program will include (1) a local pre-selection round, where island-based judges evaluate grower samples; (2) a final selection round judged by an international panel, advancing the top entries per category; and (3) distribution of sample packs to roasters worldwide to generate buyer interest. Growers will also receive private feedback on their coffee to support ongoing quality improvement, alongside HCA-coordinated education on best post-harvest practices.	TBD, Project pending
Enhancing the Competitiveness of Hawaii Specialty Crop Industry through a Statewide Media Campaign	Statewide	**Hawaii Department of Agriculture** will partner with competitively selected entities through a state-wide media campaign promoting Hawaii specialty crops to increase their visibility. Recipients will feature Hawaii specialty crops/farms/farmers in media channels—either or both traditional and digital media.	$54,050.00
Hawaii Grown Specialty Crops at the Global Produce Show & Floral Show	Honolulu	The **Hawaii Department of Agriculture** will support four Hawaii-grown exhibits for different specialty crops at the Global Produce and Floral Show (GPFS). Exposure and marketing at the GPFS aim to increase consumer knowledge and education, sales leads and consumer purchasing, and overall competitiveness of Hawaii-grown specialty crops, driving increased consumption.	$55,949.64
Hawaii Grown Specialty Crops' Pavilion, USA World Food Exhibition at Gulfood	Honolulu	The **Hawaii Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity** (HDAB) will present three Hawaii grown specialty crop exhibitors at the USA World Food Exhibition at Gulfood, the world's largest food and beverage expo. Exposure and marketing at the expo will increase sales leads, increase consumer knowledge, and stimulate business transactions to enhance the competitiveness of Hawaii-grown specialty crops. HDAB will compile a post-show report from each exhibitor to assess performance and/or areas for improvement. HDAB will also encourage exhibitors to follow up with their sales leads post-show.	$55,906.32
Education, Accessibility & Value of Hawaii Floriculture Program	Hilo	The **Hawaii Floriculture and Nursery Association** (HFNA) will create a series of tutorial videos to educate floral industry professionals on how to use Hawaii-grown tropical flowers and foliage. Each video will share practical tips and techniques to strengthen floral design skills and enhance creative work. These videos will be housed in a new tutorial library on the HFNA website. Several will be shared on social media to promote the educational events that HFNA will host.	$54,000.00
Da Fungi Campus - A Learning Center Focused on the Cultivation of Mushrooms	Kailua-Kona	**Hawaii Small Kine Farm** will establish Da Fungi Campus, a learning center focused on cultivating lion’s mane mushrooms for their medicinal, culinary, and market value. The project’s main deliverables include an immersive training program that provides foundational knowledge and hands-on experience in mushroom cultivation, as well as access to climate-controlled grow rooms, equipment, and organic spawn (like a seed starter). Expected outcomes include more trained graduates who can successfully grow lion’s mane mushrooms, manage their own cultivation enterprises, or rent shelving space within the farm’s facilities.	$69,700.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Neighbors Feeding Neighbors	Honolulu	**Kōkua Kalihi Valley Comprehensive Family Services**' Roots Cultural Food Hub program will increase consumer demand and purchasing for Hawai'i-grown specialty crops, including 'ulu, kalo, 'uala, cassava, tropical fruits, and leafy greens and herbs by implementing practical educational activities that strengthen consumers' ability to recognize, select, prepare, store, and cook specialty crops in everyday meals. Project activities include cooking demonstrations that give consumers repeated hands-on exposure to specialty crops, guided tours and food sampling events that connect shoppers directly to locally grown produce, distributions centered on providing consumers specialty crops for no-cost, and development of a suite of educational materials.	$68,958.57
Hoʻoulu Maile: Cultivating a Native Non-Timber Forest Product to Replace Imported Supply	Kailua-Kona	**La Torre LLC DBA Malipolipo** will conduct a project to educate local producers in the production of traditional maile plants. Educational materials will be developed to expand production knowledge of turning this native canopy species into farmed crops. The project will help Hawaiians interested in advancing this specialty crop build the domestic supply capacity needed to serve cultural lei makers, floral shops, resort spas, and wellness buyers who cannot reliably source locally grown maile.	TBD, project pending
From Pod to Paste: Developing a Native Hawaiian Cacao Starter Culture to Eliminate Post-Harvest Processing Bottlenecks	Honolulu	The **University of Hawai`i** at Mānoa will accelerate and standardize Hawaiʻi cacao processing by comparing local fermentation microbiomes with high-efficiency international regions to develop an optimized, low-cost indigenous starter culture. This project aims to solve prolonged, unpredictable fermentation cycles by identifying high-performing microbial strains that can be easily distributed back to local farmers. The project will use comparative genomic profiling to select native Hawaiian equivalents of fast-fermenting global strains, ensuring complete biosecurity compliance.	$70,000.00

IDAHO STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $2,275,457.66 ● Number of Subawards: 18

The Idaho State Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 7 research projects, 2 education and outreach projects, 4 marketing projects, and 5 projects that cross more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including apples, beans, cherries, grapes, onions, and potatoes throughout the State of Idaho.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Integrated Nonthermal Plasma Treatment for Improved Crop Seed Processing	Boise	**Boise State University** (BSU) will conduct a project that integrates a non-thermal plasma device onto a gravity separation table used in seed processing to improve germination and yields. Specifically, the project will work to inactivate human pathogens responsible for foodborne illnesses that are found on sprouted seeds. The plasma treatment is intended to reduce pathogen loads while retaining germination rates and sprout quality. BSU will provide results at scientific conferences, in literature, and on the BSU website and others, to support seed crop producers and the larger U.S. seed and food processing industry.	$130,000.00
Adaptability, Nutrient, Growth, Precocity, and Quality Attributes of New Stone Fruits Under Southwest Idaho Conditions	Caldwell	Researchers at the **College of Idaho** will study the adaptability of new stone fruit trees to southwestern Idaho. The project will investigate tree growth, frost resistance, leaf mineral uptake, chlorophyll and other pigments, chilling and heat unit requirements, bloom and harvest dates, and precocity in a variety of new stone fruit trees. The project intends to introduce new cultivars that have greater adaptability and can increase profitability of producers who grow them. Researchers will also disseminate project results to growers, students, and community members through a variety of educational and marketing opportunities.	$100,000.00
Creating Exposure and Demand of Idaho Apples through Consumer Promotions, Website, and Social Media	Parma	The **Idaho Apple Commission** will build on consumer and retail promotions to create more awareness of Idaho apples through social media, its website, and engagement with retailers and local schools. Communicating to consumers about when Idaho apples are available is important for the local apple industry. The project will also work with local schools to educate children about the nutritional value of apples and their importance in Idaho agriculture.	$25,000.00
Idaho's Bean Bragging Rights Marketing Campaign	Boise	The **Idaho Bean Commission** will create a marketing campaign to create grower awareness for its clean, disease-free bean seed as well as an education campaign to increase demand for beans. The multi-faceted marketing campaign will include advertisements in industry publications, social media presence, blog posts, and direct mailers. The education component will include infographics on the positive economic impact in Idaho of beans and state-wide media outreach on trends for consumer preferences.	$105,000.00
Irrigation Strategies for Optimum Bean Quality and Bacterial Disease Management	Boise	The **Idaho Bean Commission**, together with the University of Idaho, will develop new optimum irrigation strategies for bean growers. This project will conduct field trials to determine the impact of planting and irrigation cut off dates on bean yields, as well as comparing furrow and overhead irrigation types with different considerations of timing and duration.	$79,980.00
Creating Awareness and Increasing Demand for Idaho Cherries through Local Promotions, Website, and Social Media	Parma	The **Idaho Cherry Commission** will work with local retailers to include in-store demonstrations and partner with local chefs and restaurants to create promotions to build excitement about the Idaho cherry season. In addition, social media promotions and new website information will help create awareness and increase demand for Idaho cherries.	$20,000.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Optimum Irrigation Strategies for Idaho Onions to Reduce Bacterial Decay and Physiological Defects	Parma	The **Idaho Eastern Oregon Onion Committee,** through the University of Idaho, will conduct a study investigating the impact of irrigation on bacterial decay, yield, and bulb quality for onion crops. A large plot field trial will be established comparing drip, furrow, and overhead irrigation and will determine the economic benefits of each in relation to yield and quality.	$70,000.00
The Changing World and Idaho Wines	Garden City	The **Idaho Grape Growers and Wine Producers Commission** will conduct strategic marketing campaigns using search engine optimization and artificial intelligence (AI) strategies to entice new wine enthusiasts to Idaho's wine regions. Campaigns and related metrics will target specific demographics locally, regionally, and nationally. The campaigns will also develop and implement promotional materials that feature Idaho vineyards, wineries, and cideries, appealing to both existing wine enthusiasts and younger generations of wine consumers.	$215,000.00
Increasing Demand and Awareness of Idaho Hops through Trade Missions, Local Promotions, and Social Media	Parma	The **Idaho Hop Growers Association** will travel for domestic and international trade missions to bring international buyers into Idaho to increase awareness and demand for Idaho Hops. Radio advertising and other local promotional opportunities will also increase awareness of the industry.	$92,922.00
Strengthening Market Access and Business Growth for Idaho Specialty Crop Producers	Boise	Idaho Preferred, a program of the **Idaho State Department of Agriculture,** will expand market opportunities for Idaho specialty crop producers through coordinated retail partnerships, consumer marketing campaigns, food service engagement, and producer business development resources designed to support long-term industry growth. This initiative focuses on increasing visibility and demand for Idaho-grown specialty crops while helping producers scale their businesses into new market channels, including retail grocery and foodservice.	$279,587.00
Introducing Idaho Wines to Japan	Boise	The **Idaho State Department of Agriculture** will plan and execute an inbound mission of buyers and a media contact to introduce Idaho's wine region(s) to Japan, while facilitating business connections for Idaho wine producers that are interested in exporting its products to increase sales. Idaho producers would benefit from the opportunity to showcase their wines to the right international audience to claim stake in some of the markets, and this project will aim to address that by facilitating meaningful introductions.	$15,325.00
Increasing Recognition of IEOOC Onions through Social Media, Trade Shows, Global Travel, and Promotions	Parma	The **Idaho-Eastern Oregon Onion Committee** will promote the onion growing region of Idaho by bringing in new and existing buyers, both domestically and internationally, to visit the area and meet with onion producers and shippers. The project will continue to increase recognition of Idaho onions and their growing conditions and use local promotions and advertising to create more demand for them.	$107,922.63
Reducing Codling Moth Populations in the Magic Valley through Sterile Insect Release	Twin Falls	**Mid Snake Resource Conservation and Development Council** seeks to mitigate the impact of codling moth damage to apple and pear trees in orchards throughout the valley. The project will include monitoring the presence of codling moth and then releasing sterile male codling moths into infected orchards weekly during the season to mate with wild moths—with the intent of reducing the wild coddling moth population and related fruit damage and negative economic impacts.	$61,177.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Showcasing Specialty Crop Growers in North Idaho with Farm Stands	Hauser	The **Panhandle Farm Corridor** will conduct coordinated marketing to showcase north Idaho specialty crop growers with farm stands. Activities will include developing and launching a website as well as print materials, social media posts, emails, advertising, and farm tours to increase public awareness and farm stand sales. Through these coordinated promotional efforts, the Panhandle Farm Corridor will help specialty crop growers increase visibility, attract new customers, and strengthen direct-to-consumer sales to support local agriculture.	$93,742.00
Growing Demand for Idaho-Grown Wines: A Two-year Strategic Marketing and Agricultural Tourism Initiative	Huston	**Sunnyslope Wine Trail, Inc**., a nonprofit association of 20 grape growers and winemakers in Idaho's Snake River Valley, will increase awareness and demand for Idaho-grown wine grapes through a coordinated two-year regional marketing and agricultural tourism initiative. The project's purpose is to expand consumer recognition of the Sunnyslope Wine Region, strengthen direct-to-consumer wine sales, and increase visitation to rural wineries that primarily produce wines from Idaho-grown grapes.	$100,000.00
Evaluating Methods of Potato Virus Y Management Under Idaho Conditions	Idaho Falls	The **University of Idaho** will evaluate effectiveness of cultural control and biological control for seed potato growers to manage Potato virus Y (PVY) under Idaho growing conditions. In small-plot experiments over two years, the effects of these practices on PVY incidence, virus strain composition in harvested tubers, and densities of beneficial insects will be examined.	$141,000.00
Can Chemically Induced Chromosome Doubling Improve Cultivability and Transplant Survival of Big Mountain Huckleberry (Vaccinium membranaceum)?	Moscow	The **University of Idaho** Department of Plant Science and the Department of Entomology, Plant Pathology and Nematology will employ innovative techniques to improve the cultivability and transplant survival of big mountain huckleberries. By combining micropropagation and laboratory induced chromosome duplication, this project intends to support more rapid production of many improved huckleberry selections needed for domestication efforts.	$139,213.00
Bioherbicide Sorgoleone as Potential Alternatives to CIPC for Sprout Control in Stored Potatoes	Kimberly	**University of Idaho** will test the hypothesis that the bioherbicide sorgoleone can inhibit sprouting in potato tubers during storage. Specifically, the study aims to evaluate the efficacy of sorgoleone as a sprout suppressant in russet-type potatoes, compare its performance with CIPC, and characterize its physiological, morphological, and biochemical effects on sprout development and tuber quality.	$149,000.00

ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $796,255.11 ● Number of Subawards: 12

The Illinois Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 3 research projects, 4 education and outreach projects, 2 marketing projects, and 3 projects that cross more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including American persimmon, American plum, apples, microgreens, and sweetcorn throughout the State of Illinois.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Increasing Farmer Sales of Specialty Crops Sold at the 61st Street Farmers Market	Chicago	The **Experimental Station,** with its 61st Street Farmers Market, seeks to increase farmer sales of Illinois specialty crops through expansion of its educational programming. The project aims to rebuild local knowledge of the nutritional benefits and pleasure of consuming Illinois specialty crops as well as how to grow and prepare them. Food education will focus on providing at-market educational opportunities with recipes, cooking tips, and farmer and crop spotlights shared through social media, weekly e-newsletters, and direct outreach.	$49,997.09
Growing Demand: Connecting Chicago Students with Illinois Specialty Crops Through Farm-to-School Education	Chicago	**Common Threads** will implement this 21-month farm to school education initiative to strengthen the competitiveness of Illinois specialty crops by increasing student awareness, consumption, and appreciation of locally grown fruits and vegetables while improving child nutrition across Chicago.	$49,844.16
Fresh From the Pantry Culinary Skills to Increase Specialty Crop Consumption	Caledonia	**Farmers Rising** will partner with five community partner sites in Winnebago and Boone County to provide hands-on culinary education programs. The project will teach participants how to prepare affordable, healthy meals using specialty crops commonly available through food pantries and local food systems. Participants will learn cooking techniques, taste a variety of fruits, vegetables, and herbs, and receive recipes to use at home.	$45,550.46
Locally Fresh Market Co-Op Expansion	Chicago	**Fuller Park Community Development**, through Eden Place Farm, will expand Chicago's Locally Fresh Market Co-Op by increasing access to Illinois specialty crops, supporting local farmers, improving food safety and distribution, and educating the community about healthy produce. This project will further develop this fresh food market, making it accessible five days out of the week to the surrounding communities.	$46,712.50
Promotion of Illinois Specialty Crops at Canadian Health Food Association Natural Organic Wellness Trade Show Vancouver and Toronto	Springfield	The **Illinois Department of Agriculture** (IDOA) will identify locally grown commodities and encourage consumers, both domestically and especially internationally, to purchase and consume more Illinois specialty crops. IDOA staff will coordinate an Illinois Pavilion for members of Illinois' specialty crop industry to exhibit at the 2027 Canadian Health Food Association Natural Organic Wellness (CHFA NOW) Trade Shows, which focus on natural, organic, and wellness products.	$54,507.25
Expansion and Continuation of the Illinois Product Program and Promotion of Illinois Specialty Crops	Springfield	The **Illinois Department of Agriculture** seeks to continue revitalizing its 30-year-old Illinois Products program through continued Illinois Grown promotions—to expand participation, boost visibility, and drive access, consumption, and support for Illinois specialty crops. The program will conduct targeted advertising, video storytelling, and events including through social media, website, and newsletters to expand visibility and support for specialty crops produced, processed, and/or packaged in Illinois.	$154,041.00
Illinois Specialty Crop Resiliency through the Illinois Specialty Crop Conference & Business Consulting	Bloomington	The **Illinois Specialty Growers Association** will host a comprehensive three-day Illinois specialty crop conference designed to strengthen the viability and competitiveness of specialty crop farms across Illinois. The Springfield conference will feature more than 100 educational sessions and a 100-vendor tradeshow, offering producers extensive access to technical expertise, industry innovations, and market opportunities.	$100,000.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Flying Under the Radar Understanding Drivers and Patterns of Pollinating Flies and Bees in Illinois Apple Orchards	Normal	The Clem Lab at **Illinois State University** will examine the importance of fly pollination in Illinois apple production. The project will collaborate with 14 Illinois apple growers across the state to better understand pollinator species composition, foraging patterns, and responses to landscape structure. The project will gather key foundational knowledge on the pollination ecology and habitat needs of Midwest Diptera pollinators, filling a major knowledge gap that will facilitate successful implementation of integrated pest and pollinator management.	$49,997.00
Growing in a Changing Environment	Champaign	The **Land Connection Foundation** will collaborate with specialty crop producers, community stakeholders, and content experts to deliver producer-driven field education programs emphasizing practical and hands-on training to improve the long-term viability and sustainability of Illinois special crop producers adversely impacted by extreme weather events and intensifying weed and pest pressures. This project will host three full-day field training days geared toward beginning special crop producers in Illinois and focused on the practical adoption of resilient farming practices amidst changing weather patterns.	$45,152.10
Illinois Specialty Crop Education & Culinary Demonstration Initiative	Champaign	**Prairie Fruits Farm & Creamery** will establish a regional specialty crop education initiative using its newly constructed educational classroom facility to provide free and low-cost workshops, farm tours, culinary demonstrations, and youth programming focused on Illinois specialty crops. Project activities will include weekly classes and seasonal workshops led by Illinois Extension educators, regional growers, chefs, and local food business operators.	$49,910.00
Enhancing Food Safety of Hydroponic Microgreens in Illinois	Carbondale	**Southern Illinois University** (SIU) will investigate the efficacy of a multi-hurdle food safety intervention strategy in hydroponic microgreen production systems. Validated technology will be disseminated among specialty crop growers of Illinois via fact sheets, YouTube videos, and demonstrations on SIU campus. An impact study will be conducted by survey of specialty crop growers in Illinois.	$50,000.00
Microplastic Contamination in Specialty Crop Agriculture Impacts, Monitoring, and Outreach in Illinois	Champaign	Researchers at the **University of Illinois** will assess the extent of microplastic (MP) contamination in specialty crop production systems across Illinois and develop a comprehensive strategy to mitigate MP contamination, improve sustainability, and enhance farm viability. This pilot study, the first of its kind in the U.S. Midwest, will compare farms that primarily use plasticulture practices with those that do not, to evaluate MP prevalence and its effects on soil health, microbiota, and nutrient cycling.	$49,950.00

INDIANA STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $635,414.60 ● Number of Subawards: 4

The Indiana State Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 1 research project, 1 education and outreach project, and 2 marketing projects to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including vegetables, apples, peaches, pears, and cut flowers, including snapdragons, ranunculus, lisianthus, and dahlias, throughout the State of Indiana.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Indiana Cut Flower Grower Advancement: Production, Irrigation, & Season Extension Demonstration	Rolling Prairie	**Blue Family Farms** will establish and execute a project to improve specialty cut flower production, season extension, irrigation efficiency, and post-harvest handling practices for Indiana growers. The project will focus on high-value specialty crops including snapdragons, ranunculus, lisianthus, and dahlias. Project findings and educational resources will be made publicly available providing scalable, field-tested production systems that improve profitability, sustainability, and market access for Indiana specialty crop growers.	$137,561.80
Indiana Specialty Crop Market Access and Food Safety Advancement Initiative	Indianapolis	**Indiana Grown** will conduct an initiative to strengthen both the market readiness and market reach of Indiana specialty crop producers. By integrating produce safety training and third-party certification support with a coordinated Indiana presence at high-value regional and national trade shows, this project provides a comprehensive approach to increasing competitiveness, improving food safety compliance, and expanding market access for Indiana specialty crops.	$175,000.00
Specialty Crop Block Grant	West Lafayette	**Purdue University** will establish and execute a project to address a critical need among Indiana's small-scale specialty crop growers, including both vegetable and cut flower producers, for transplant production. The project will conduct replicated indoor propagation experiments using tomato and snapdragon as complementary model crops, representing vegetable and cut flower production systems, respectively.	$104,001.36
Specialty Crop Modular Controlled Atmosphere Storage for Increased Sales Season & Market Enhancement	Bloomington	**Slaughter Orchard & Cidery** will conduct research to evaluate the effective use of modular controlled atmosphere bins, to maximize the storage season of apples, peaches, and pears, resulting in a longer sales season, an extended value-added processing window, and an enhanced market for specialty crops. Trials will be conducted over 16-week periods, where a box is opened each week to assess the maximum length of time different varieties can be held in controlled atmosphere storage. Stored fruits will be tested for firmness (using a penetrometer), storage disease prevalence, packout rate (% of sellable apples), and taste. atmosphere bins for carbonic maceration of fruit. This type of value-added product is not currently available in Indiana. Results from these trials will be shared with other orchards and vineyards through demonstration days and industry events.	$168,017.84

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND LAND STEWARDSHIP
Funds Awarded to State: $435,734.12 ● Number of Subawards: 13

The Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 7 research projects, 3 education and outreach projects and 3 projects that cross more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including Christmas trees, honey, wine grapes, limes, and apples throughout the State of Iowa.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
The Buzz About Bees: Pollinators and Specialty Crop Connections	West Des Moines	The **Iowa Agriculture Literacy Foundation** will lead a project to increase awareness and understanding of the relationship between pollinators and specialty crops through the development of scaffolded instructional units for students from elementary through high school. These units will include lessons and educational materials focused on bees as pollinators, pollination science, the role of pollinators in specialty crop production, and factors impacting pollinator populations.	$30,000.00
Choose Iowa Grown Specialty Crop Products Campaign to Increase Consumer Awareness and Consumption of Local Iowa Agricultural Products	Des Moines	The **Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship** will develop and implement online tools and resources to foster and enable business-to-business wholesale sales of Iowa grown specialty crops to retail and institutional entities. Increasingly, Iowa specialty crop producers are expanding their sales beyond direct-to-consumer and seeking to enter or expand wholesale sales to restaurants, schools, and grocery stores—which require different information and licensing for product safety and quality assurances than consumers do.	$70,494.00
2027 Iowa Specialty Producers Conference	Ames	The **Iowa Specialty Crop Growers Association** (ISCGA) will partner with the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship and key industry stakeholders to coordinate and manage the 2027 Iowa Specialty Producers Conference. ISCGA will also collaborate with organizations such as the Iowa Nut Growers Association, Iowa Christmas Tree Association, Iowa Honey Producers Association, Iowa Farmers Market Association, and Iowa greenhouse growers to encourage member participation and gather insights that strengthen and expand the event offerings. Core responsibilities include selecting the conference date and venue, securing speakers, developing program materials, coordinating with exhibitors and sponsors, and leading marketing and outreach efforts to maximize engagement and attendance.	$18,495.00
Managing Soil pH for Iowa Specialty Crops	Ames	**Iowa State University** Extension and Outreach will evaluate elemental sulfur application rates across several locations and monitor soil pH changes over approximately 18 months to determine how quickly and to what extent soil pH is lowered. The project will develop more accurate sulfur rate recommendations for Iowa specialty crops, such as apples and blueberries, that require lower soil pH, helping growers manage soil conditions and reduce nutrient deficiency risks.	$30,000.00
Viral Threats to Iowa Apple Production: A Comprehensive Virome Survey of Malus domestica	Ames	**Iowa State University** researchers will implement the first statewide apple virus survey to assess the prevalence, distribution, and complexity of viral infections affecting apple cultivars in Iowa. The survey will support the identification of potential new virus threats and disseminate results through Extension outreach and other stakeholder engagement to directly benefit Iowa apple producers.	$29,866.00
New Crops for Iowa's Nursery Industry: Dieback Shrubs to Diversify the Ornamental Plant Palette of the Upper Midwest	Ames	This horticulturist project at **Iowa State University** aims to increase the number of attractive landscape plants that Iowa's nurseries can produce and market in the Upper Midwest. Specifically, they will conduct trials focused on selecting highly attractive shrubs that, while not fully cold hardy in this region, can be grown as shrubs that will rejuvenate themselves annually by forming new stems, leaves, flowers, etc. from roots that are sufficiently hardy.	$29,570.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Optimizing Fermentation of Iowa Specialty Fruits to Expand Value-Added Opportunities	Ames	The Midwest Grape and Wine Industry Institute at **Iowa State University** will improve the consistency of fermented beverages made from Iowa specialty fruit crops—by developing science-based fermentation recommendations based on yeast selection and yeast nutrient management. Expected outcomes are more consistent fermentations, increased confidence in fermentation management, and expanded market opportunities for Iowa specialty crop producers.	$29,854.86
Effects of Pre-Harvest Conditioning on Sod Establishment under Deficit Irrigation	Ames	**Iowa State University** turfgrass researchers aim to reduce the irrigation required for sod establishment by using specific pre-harvest treatments. Research plots will be demonstrated at the 2027 and 2028 Iowa Turfgrass Field and Demo Days, and results will be presented at the 2028 and 2029 Iowa Turfgrass Conferences. This research will identify successful preconditioning treatments and provide sod producers tools to improve installation success with less irrigation, which will benefit growers, installers, and end-users.	$29,945.00
Supporting Producers in Navigating Loans, Grants, and Funding Opportunities: Cultivating Capital Train the Trainer and Producer Trainings	Ames	**Iowa State University** Extension and Outreach, in partnership with the National Association for State Departments of Agriculture, will conduct a project to provide actionable tools for business modeling, financial statements, cost analysis, cash-flow planning, and capital pathway decision making. These producer- and train-the-trainer trainings will be designed to strengthen the financial readiness of Iowa's specialty crop producers. They will help increase producers' capacity to access, manage, and leverage financial capital for business growth through avenues such as loans, grants, and other funding opportunities.	$30,000.00
Alternative Farm Food Safety Assessments for Wholesale Customers	Amana	**Iowa Valley Resource Conservation & Development** (IVRCD) will lead a collaborative project with Iowa State University (ISU) Extension and Outreach to expand accessible, practical food safety training and develop alternative verification pathways for small and mid-sized produce farmers across Iowa. The purpose of this project is to improve farmers' ability to implement on-farm food safety practices, reduce barriers to market access, and increase buyer confidence in locally produced food. ISU and IVRCD wish to pilot the Iowa Farm Food Safety Assessment Program (IFFSA) with six farms as an alternative third-party food safety audit of a farm's food safety practices and policies. By utilizing the publicly available Harmonized GAP standards ISU and IVRCD can conduct a simple assessment of a farm's food safety practices and policies and provide a report for wholesale buyers to verify a farm's practices for a reduced cost.	$25,000.00
Iowa Wine Growers Association Annual Conference	Bondurant	The **Iowa Wine Growers Association** will partner with the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship and industry stakeholders to plan, coordinate, and implement the 2027 IWGA Annual Conference, delivering educational programming and professional development for specialty crop producers. Tasks will include securing the venue and speakers, developing materials, coordinating exhibitors and sponsors, and conducting targeted marketing and outreach to increase participation and industry impact.	$15,000.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Expanding Iowa's Access to Naturally Grown Vegetables and Farmer Market Opportunities	Des Moines	**Lutheran Services in Iowa** will strengthen specialty crop production in Iowa by increasing the number of vegetable farmers who achieve Certified Naturally Grown (CNG) certification and complete Produce Safety Alliance food safety training, improving product quality and expanding access to local markets. Expected outcomes include improved specialty crop production and quality, increased farmer participation in CNG and food safety certification, expanded market opportunities, and stronger local food systems in Iowa.	$30,000.00
Cover Crops for Weed Suppression in Specialty Crop Systems	Ames	**Practical Farmers of Iowa** will support specialty crop farmers to conduct trials testing the effects of summer cover crops in horticultural settings, and to share results and experiences with fellow farmers. This project will directly serve horticulture farmers who wish to learn how to better incorporate weed suppression tactics on their farms and ameliorate their soil with cover crops.	$30,000.00

KANSAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $383,242.73 ● Number of Subawards: 6

The Kansas Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 2 research projects, 3 education and outreach projects, and 1 marketing project to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including elderberry, pumpkins, and apples throughout the State of Kansas.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Pumpkins with a Purpose: Enhancing Specialty Crop Production, Education, and Sustainability	Iola	**Allen County Community College** will advance the competitiveness and sustainability of the specialty crop industry in southeast Kansas by conducting applied research and delivering producer education and community outreach using pumpkin production as a model system. The college will establish a 5,000 square foot demonstration plot to evaluate pumpkin varieties and production practices relevant to regional growing conditions to improve production efficiency, reduce input costs, and increase adoption of sustainable practices.	$39,236.30
Start-Up Funding for Heartland Elderberry Collaborative	Paola	The **Heartland Elderberry Collaborative** will be formally established to enhance the competitiveness of Kansas-grown American elderberry and increase consumer access. Project activities include completing legal incorporation and governance structures to ensure collaboration amongst growers and value-added producers, conducting data mapping and market analytics, and developing a central website to serve as a unified consumer education platform and a member portal for resource sharing, discussion, and future equipment scheduling.	$37,270.80

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Expanding Kansas Apple Education to Increase Specialty Crop Awareness and Consumption Among Elementary Students	Manhattan	The **Kansas Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom** (KFAC) will increase elementary students' knowledge and consumption of specialty crops by developing a standards-aligned lesson unit for 3rd to 5th grade teachers centered on Kansas apple production. KFAC will distribute 200 classroom kits, including stipends for teachers to purchase Kansas-grown apples to use in the lessons. Lessons will incorporate nutrition concepts, practical applications such as storage and preparation, and Kansas specialty crop production information such as a Kansas apple farmer video profile.	$96,910.02
Drought-Responsive Irrigation for Specialty Crop Landscapes in Kansas: Consumer, Industry, and Municipal Perspectives	Manhattan	**Kansas State University** will evaluate how consumers, landscape professionals, and municipal staff perceive specialty crop landscapes managed under drought-responsive irrigation scenarios. Using high-quality images generated from established research plots, the project will implement coordinated online surveys that will assess tolerance for reduced irrigation, perceived performance and appearance of drought-adapted specialty crop plant palettes, industry-specific economic and operational constraints, and municipal priorities related to drought management and public landscapes.	$45,250.86
Enhancing Specialty Crop Competitiveness through Year-Round Production, Student Training, and Community Engagement	Manhattan	**Kansas State University** will develop and demonstrate a resilient, year-round specialty crop production system suitable for Kansas conditions at the Willow Lake Student Farm. The project will integrate season extension practices to enable continuous production of at least 50 specialty crop varieties. Yield and soil data will be analyzed to create research-based production recommendations and grower protocols. Results will be shared broadly through field days, workshops, conference presentations, and extension publications to support adoption by Kansas producers.	$52,937.28
Innovative Sprayable Edible Coating to Reduce Frost Damage and Economic Losses in Kansas Specialty Vegetables	Pittsburg	**Pittsburg State University** will develop and validate a sprayable, edible, biodegradable anti-frost coating using Kansas-available biopolymers combined with natural additives that protect crops. The anti-frost coating will provide passive protection in open-field conditions by delaying ice formation and reducing frost-induced plant damage, helping preserve crop yield and quality during critical growth stages. It will also reduce reliance on energy and water-intensive frost mitigation methods, improving farm resilience and lowering economic losses.	$97,610.83

KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $413,908.66 ● Number of Subawards: 8

The Kentucky Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 4 education and outreach projects and 4 marketing projects to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including apples, peaches, pears, blueberries, strawberries, chestnuts, honey, and fresh seasonal vegetables throughout the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Honey Bee Pest and Disease Monitoring: Safeguarding Honey Yields and Pollination Networks Through Rapid Apiary Response	Frankfort	The **Kentucky Department of Agriculture** (KDA) will safeguard the state's honey yields and specialty crop pollination networks by developing a modernized, proactive apiary emergency response system. To reduce devastating colony losses from rapid-onset threats, such as acute transportation accidents, pesticide exposures, severe weather, and contagious disease outbreaks, KDA will deploy advanced ArcGIS software and rapid-diagnostic field equipment to create a real-time, spatially accurate apiary database.	$49,708.00
Microgreens in the City: A High-Efficiency Specialty Crop: Production, Food Safety, and Distribution Model for Kentucky	Frankfort	**525 Kitchen, Inc.** will strengthen Kentucky specialty crop competitiveness by developing and demonstrating a compact hydroponic microgreens production model designed for beginning farmers, urban growers, and small-scale producers. The project will establish a 15 x 20 controlled environment hoop structure to evaluate production efficiency, food safety practices, and practical adoption strategies for year-round specialty crop production.	$33,779.00
Building KY Chestnut Knowledge Infrastructure: Pest, Disease & Market	Falls of Rough	**EBB Farms Lone Hill LLC**, in partnership with DTM Collective LLC dba United Chestnuts and the University of Kentucky Fruit and Nut Extension team, will improve the competitiveness of Kentucky chestnut production by developing freely available, Kentucky-specific pest and disease management resources for growers and prospective producers statewide.	$20,000.00
Kentucky High-Density Tree Fruit Systems Training and Demonstration Initiative	Lexington	The **University of Kentucky** (UK) Research Foundation will conduct a project to build from existing high-density apple, peach, and pear plantings to collect harvest, yield, fruit quality, labor, crop-protection, canopy-management, and orchard-system data under Kentucky conditions. The results from UK's Modern Training Systems Orchard will be translated into field days, orchard walks, focused extension publications, agent-training materials, and an English- and Spanish-language video training series.	$59,673.00
Identifying Melon Varieties with Nutrient Density Characteristics Suited for Local Markets	Lexington	The **University of Kentucky** Horticulture and Agriculture Economics team will evaluate several different watermelon cultivars for yield, nutrition, flavor, and consumer preference. Information will be disseminated to commercial growers and county agents through presentations at the statewide fruit and vegetable conference, a field day, and a fact sheet.	$59,716.00
Modern Blueberry Production Systems, Advanced Germplasm Evaluation, and Cultivar Demonstration Initiative for Kentucky Growers	Lexington	The **University of Kentucky** Fruit Extension will evaluate advanced USDA blueberry selections on the modern raised bed production system to update the current available resources/research. This project will also host in-person field days/demonstrations. Both aim to make blueberry production more accessible and economically viable for current or aspiring blueberry growers who are currently discouraged by weed and disease pressure, soil pH, and other weather-related stressors in Kentucky.	$62,691.00
AI-Assisted Screening of Strawberry Cultivars for Neopestalotiopsis Resistance to Support Sustainable Production and Breeding in Kentucky	Lexington	The **University of Kentucky** will support sustainable strawberry production in Kentucky by identifying strawberry cultivars, heirlooms, and breeding lines with improved resistance or tolerance to Neopestalotiopsis ("Neopest") disease and by developing an AI-assisted, image-based disease-screening workflow for future cultivar evaluation and breeding. The project will also use screening results to select contrasting parents, make greenhouse crosses, and establish initial progeny populations for future genetic mapping and breeding.	$45,609.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Peer Promotion of CSA as Medicine	Lexington	The **University of Kentucky** will lead a health-focused peer-promotion initiative to increase community supported agriculture (CSA) subscription rates for fresh, seasonal vegetables while generating replicable marketing resources for CSA farmers and employer wellness programs statewide. The proposed program builds on this previous effort by creating a promotion model with an explicit health and nutrition focus aligned implementation.	$49,620.00

LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY
Funds Awarded to State: $461,475.63 ●Number of Subawards: 9

The Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 2 research projects, 2 education and outreach projects, 2 marketing projects, and 3 projects that cross more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including honey, pecans, mayhaw, and citrus fruit throughout the State of Louisiana.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Cultivating Connections: Increasing Accessibility and Sales of Louisiana Specialty Crops	Baton Rouge	The **Big River Economic and Agricultural Development Alliance** will cultivate connections between producers and consumers in the Greater Baton Rouge area. This will be accomplished by conducting regional marketing, implementing farmers market programs, and developing a new retail outlet for specialty crops for the purpose of increasing access to and sales of specialty crops.	$47,590.00
Apprenticeship for Growing New Beekeepers and Honey Producers in Louisiana	Baton Rouge	The **Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry** will work in partnership with high school agricultural programs to educate students on beekeeping by supplying them with the needs and equipment necessary to grow bees and produce honey. The project will address concerns regarding the long-term growth of the beekeeping industry in Louisiana which has been declining.	$40,000.00
Certified Louisiana Specialty Crop Initiative: Brand Expansion, Consumer Education, and Market Development	Baton Rouge	The **Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry** will enhance the competitiveness of Louisiana specialty crops through development of a new Certified Louisiana Specialty Crop designation and a coordinated statewide consumer education campaign. The project will create a specialty crop-specific branding tool, secure trademark protection, produce ten educational "Myth Busters" videos, and deploy promotional materials statewide through retail, events, and digital channels.	$72,879.94

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Developing Data-Driven Guidance for Weather-Related Risk Management in Louisiana Mayhaw Orchards	Columbia	The **Louisiana Mayhaw Association** will improve the resiliency and competitiveness of the state's mayhaw specialty crop industry by collecting site specific environmental data to better understand weather-related impacts on bloom and fruit development. The project will deploy fixed weather monitoring systems at multiple orchard locations and integrate environmental data with grower-reported observations. The project will also promote industry-wide learning, help address critical data gaps, and support data-driven risk assessment and mitigation strategy development by disseminating summarized data and findings publicly to support mayhaw researchers, producers, and stakeholders.	$57,900.00
Integrated Deer Management Strategies to Protect Specialty Crops in Louisiana	Hammond	The **Louisiana State University** (LSU) Agricultural Center Hammond Research Station will demonstrate and evaluate the effectiveness and economic viability of deer feeding deterrent strategies on specialty crops in Louisiana. The project will evaluate five deterrent strategies using a replicated field demonstration design, including fencing, electric deterrents, repellents, and integrated combinations of these approaches to address severe deer feeding damage to reduce the negative effects to producing vegetables, small fruits, nurseries, and orchard crops across the state. Researchers will disseminate results through field days, grower meetings, and LSU AgCenter Extension publications, providing producers with practical, adoptable recommendations	$23,471.00
Individual Protective Covers to Improve Citrus Establishment and Production Under Endemic Citrus Greening (Huanglongbing)	Baton Rouge	The **Louisiana State University** (LSU) Agricultural Center will investigate the use of insect-excluding screen bags, known as Individual Protective Covers (IPCs) as a citrus greening (Huanglongbing/HLB) management tool within the Louisiana citrus quarantine area. Stakeholders will deploy IPCs on farm to exclude the Asian citrus psyllid (Diaphorina citri), allowing the researcher to measure HLB infection rates at one and two years post-planting, as well as protective effectiveness in hurricane and freeze events. Results will be shared at the annual LSU AgCenter Citrus Symposium of researchers and producers.	$17,910.64
Evaluating Low-Input Pecan Cultivars to Expand Sustainable Production in Louisiana	Alexandria	The **Louisiana State University** (LSU) Agricultural Center will evaluate low-input pecan cultivars to identify selections adapted to reduced-input production systems. Through replicated field trials and grower collaboration, this work will generate performance data and outreach resources to improve cultivar recommendations and expand sustainable pecan production for Louisiana growers and homeowners. LSU will disseminate research findings through extension outreach and collaboration with nursery partners to increase availability of high-performing selections from this work.	$56,200.00
Development of a Bio-Based Antimicrobial Spray Using Microbial Peptides to Enhance Food Safety and Shelf Life of Louisiana Specialty Crops	Baton Rouge	The **Louisiana State University** (LSU) Agricultural Center will develop a novel edible antimicrobial spray that incorporates antimicrobial peptides (AMPs) derived from Bacillus subtilis – to apply to fresh produce to reduce pathogen load, inhibit biofilm formation, and extend shelf life during refrigerated and ambient storage. Outcomes of the project will be shared with growers, food processors, and regulatory stakeholders through extension programs and scientific publications.	$49,431.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Antimicrobial Absorbent Pad for Reducing Bacterial Contamination of Packaged Fresh Produce	Baton Rouge	The **Louisiana State University** (LSU) Agricultural Center will conduct a study aimed at developing an antimicrobial, hydrogel-based moisture-absorbent pad that would regulate package humidity and reduce surface wetness around fresh produce. This pad is expected to slow spoilage, limit microbial growth, and extend the shelf life of fresh produce. The project will use strawberries as the model commodity and aims to support produce safety and enhance marketability. Findings will be presented at venues such as the LSU AgCenter/Louisiana Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association field day and other relevant grower and industry meetings.	$59,175.00

MAINE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION, AND FORESTRY
Funds Awarded to State: $770,908.84 ● Number of Subawards: 8

The Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 4 research projects, 2 education and outreach projects, and 2 marketing projects to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including greens, apples, pears, potatoes, grapes, and dry beans throughout the State of Maine.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Expanding Specialty Cooking Green Production, Processing, Training, and Sales to Meet Increasing Maine Market Demand	Portland	**Cultivating Community** will provide Maine specialty greens growers with access to the resources, education, and training needed to successfully shift production from direct-to-consumer (sold by the bunch), to processing accounts (purchasing bulk quantities by the pound). Resources and training to support farmers will focus on pest management practices, testing and using upgraded systems, safe food-handling procedures, and exploring marketing channels to meet customer needs.	$97,276.00
Improving Soil Health and Vegetable Production through Cover Cropping	Augusta	The **Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry's (DACF) Agricultural Resource Development Division** will develop a series of demonstration/research plots to showcase how various cover cropping and reduced tillage methods may be employed on specialty crop farms. Project activities will include plot and treatment establishment/ maintenance, data collection and analysis, and on-site training for farmers and agricultural service providers.	$85,963.47
Demonstrate Soil Health Management Specialty Crops to Maine Producers.	Augusta	The **DAFC Agricultural Resource Development Division** will provide no-cost soil health testing for Maine specialty crop farmers, offering individualized coaching sessions with the State soil scientist to review results and identify relevant and responsive soil health practices.	$150,000.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Maine Specialty Crops for Every Generation: Education from Classroom to Community	Wiscasset	**Maine Food and Beverage Education Center** will develop and deliver a statewide, community-centered education initiative that brings specialty crop learning directly to the public. Focusing on youth, families, and seniors, this project will provide hands-on specialty crop education programs to increase consumer awareness and purchasing of Maine specialty crops.	$96,881.00
Plant Something Maine! Grow More Give More Food Campaign	Augusta	The **Maine Landscape and Nursery Association** will launch and expand the "Plant Something Maine!" strategic marketing campaign refocusing public interest on local food consumption and food security through home, school, and community garden production. This campaign will increase sales of vegetable and herb transplants sold at 17 Maine Independent Garden Centers.	$100,000.00
Orcharding Education: Growing Our Heritage Varieties for the Future and Feeding Our Communities	Unity	**Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association** will provide hands-on education through workshops that will equip current and future growers with the skills, plant material, and knowledge needed to establish and maintain productive heritage apple and pear orchards using organic, responsible growing practices.	$51,965.00
Strengthening Maine's Specialty Crop Industry and Workforce Capacity through Engaging Outreach on Modern Greenhouse Practices	Orono	**University of Maine System** will develop a statewide experiential greenhouse workforce training program that strengthens agricultural literacy and technical skills for specialty crop growers. Programming will include in-person trainings, demonstrations, and on-demand digital resources to ensure access for current and future growers and their employees.	$40,992.59
Growing Maine's Specialty Crop Workforce through Supervised Agricultural Experiences	Windsor	**Windsor Fair Agricultural Education** will lead the piloting of "Growing Maine's Specialty Crop Workforce," a statewide initiative that will connect agricultural educators and students with producers through hands-on, industry-informed Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAEs). Activities to strengthen the workforce will include educator training and planning, producer recruitment, development of SAE opportunities, student-producer matching, participation stipends, structured check-ins, documentation of student learning, industry feedback, and a public SAE showcase at Windsor Fair.	$79,402.08

MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $589,279.11 ● Number of Subawards: 9

The Maryland Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 3 research projects, 2 education and outreach projects, 2 marketing projects, and 2 projects that cross more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including maple syrup, tomatoes and okra throughout the State of Maryland.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Phase II: Scaling Production and Market Access for African Specialty Crops	Silver Spring	**AfriThrive, Inc.** will strengthen the production, aggregation, distribution, and market competitiveness of culturally significant specialty crops, including pumpkin leaves, okra, black nightshade, and spider flower. AfriThrive will provide technical assistance, crop and production planning and training, and support for Produce Safety Alliance (PSA) and Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification.	$28,652.00
Western Maryland Maple Initiative: A Mountain-to-Market Agritourism & Wholesale Strategy	Oakland	The **Appalachian Farm and Food Alliance** will launch a Mountain-to-Market strategy, establish a permanent agritourism maple trail, and expand high-value wholesale channels across the state. This project will help transition Maryland maple syrup into a competitive, year-round statewide commodity.	$40,000.00
Increasing Market Access and Distribution Efficiency for Urban Specialty Crop Producers in Maryland	Baltimore	The **Farm Alliance of Baltimore** will strengthen urban specialty crop market access, distribution efficiency, and food safety capacity for Maryland producers designing, implementing, and documenting a centralized direct-purchase aggregation pilot in Baltimore City. This innovative urban-to-urban value chain model for specialty crop procurement is designed to be replicated across Maryland's metro areas and applicable to urban agricultural networks statewide.	$85,000.00
Maryland's Best - Promoting Maryland Specialty Crops to Consumer and Distributors	Annapolis	**Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA)** will conduct a marketing and education campaign, promoting Maryland specialty crop production through the Maryland's Best branding program. MDA will feature Maryland-grown products at various agriculture shows, developing and strengthening industry networks and market opportunities for the state's specialty crop growers.	$149,964.00
Produce Safety GAP/GHP Program Market Access and FSMA Produce Safety Rule Compliance	Annapolis	The **Maryland Department of Agriculture Food Quality Assurance Program** will collaboratively work with University of Maryland partners to provide food safety education, outreach, and technical assistance through educational food safety programs, training, and resources. This project will continue to build on lessons learned from previous projects to increase the knowledge of food safety with specialty crop producers across Maryland.	$100,000.00
Maryland Farm and Harvest Season 14	Owings Mills	**Maryland Public Television and Maryland Department of Agriculture** will co-produce segments for season 14 of the Maryland Farm and Harvest television show. The season's episodes will feature Maryland-grown specialty crops and Maryland farmers, recipe segments, and education to increase awareness, knowledge, and demand for Maryland specialty crops.	$34,000.00
Precision Climate Control and Nutrient Monitoring for High Tunnel Specialty Crop Production	Woodsboro	**Moon Valley Farm** will conduct climate and nutrition research for organic high tunnel production in Maryland to generate the first paired dataset and practical guides for Maryland specialty crop growers. Moon Valley Farm will install automated thermostatic roll-up ventilation and horizontal air flow fans and conduct tissue testing and sap analysis across two growing seasons in eight of their ten high tunnels. This analysis will assess the reduction in plant disease and pest control due to the automated ventilation and increased air flow within high tunnel systems. These climate and nutrition investments will improve crop quality and extend the growing season for Maryland specialty crop growers.	$34,384.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Assessing Resistance and Ecdysis Disruption in Insects Exposed to Major Insecticidal Compounds	College Park	The **University of Maryland** will conduct research to assess pest resistance and ecdysis (molting of insect exoskeleton) disruption associated with the application of major insecticide classes. The project findings will be shared with several specialty crop growers in the state, including orchard, vineyard, and vegetable farmers, resulting in improved profitability, sustainability, and competitiveness.	$20,000.00
Integrated Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus Management Combining Host Resistance, Vector Suppression, and Viral Reservoir Reduction	College Park	The **University of Maryland** Extension will evaluate integrated management strategies for Tomato Spotted Wilt Virus (TSWV) in tomato production systems in Maryland. The project will assess resistant tomato cultivars, insecticide programs targeting insects that transmit viruses (thrips vectors), and potential virus reservoirs in weeds and unmanaged high tunnels. Management recommendations to growers will be disseminated through extension field days, Twilight Tours, grower meetings, newsletter articles, two factsheets, and a recorded webinar to improve adoption of TSWV management practices and reduce virus incidence in specialty crop production.	$35,000.00

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL RESOURCES
Funds Awarded to State: $537,491.83 ● Number of Subawards: 7

The Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 2 education and outreach projects, 3 research projects, and 2 marketing projects to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including cut flowers, tomatoes, native ornamentals, and cranberries in Massachusetts.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Advancing Native Ornamentals in the Atlantic Coastal Pine Barrens	Barnstable	**Barnstable County Cape Cod Cooperative Extension,** in partnership with the Association to Preserve Cape Cod, will advance further adoption of native Atlantic Coastal Pine Barrens through coordinated research, grower support, and public education. Key project activities include research of native plants, hosting workshops, and distribution of educational materials to strengthen producer capacity and expand use in managed landscapes.	$51,363.50
Promoting the Value of Buying Local Specialty Crops at Farmers Markets	Westborough	**Mass Farmers Markets** (MFM) will encourage consumers to purchase locally grown specialty crops at farmers markets through a coordinated marketing campaign that emphasizes the benefits of buying local produce. The project will use cohesive branding and visual design and distribute messaging through social media, radio, and print and online advertising. MFM will additionally provide digital collateral to market managers and other food system partners across the state so they can incorporate it in their own marketing efforts.	$73,028.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Flavors of Massachusetts - Celebrating Specialty Crops through Community Recipes	Boston	The **Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources** will launch an initiative to promote important specialty crops grown by Massachusetts farmers and to celebrate the many ways that they are enjoyed in communities across the state. This initiative aims to increase food access across the Commonwealth by connecting residents with locally grown specialty crops and practical ways to prepare them, including community recipes. Community members will learn how to prepare fruits and vegetables, where to purchase local produce, and what nutrition programs are available to increase access and affordability.	$100,000.00
Pick Local…Flowers: Expanding Agritourism for Massachusetts Flower Farms with the Massachusetts Blooming Byway	Statewide	The **Massachusetts Flower Growers Association** will strengthen the state's flower industry by expanding grower education, increasing adoption of cut-your-own flower farming, and launching a unified statewide marketing campaign: Pick Local…Flowers. The campaign will include brand development, trademark search and registration, a centralized website with an interactive farm locator map, printed materials (rack cards), and a coordinated social media strategy designed to drive measurable traffic to participating farms.	$43,375.00
Farmer Led Innovations in Advanced Cover Cropping Strategies for Massachusetts Specialty Crops	Florence	**Momentum Ag**, in partnership with American Farmland Trust, will advance the use of innovative cover cropping among Massachusetts specialty crop producers through a two-year peer learning cohort supported by technical assistance, financial assistance, and statewide outreach. Activities include developing advanced, farm-specific cover cropping strategies, and broadening adoption of effective cover crop systems statewide by sharing cohort learning through field walks, a winter farmer symposium, a farmer-facing report, and presentations at major agricultural conferences.	$82,714.00
Using Insectary Plants to Support Biocontrol and Pollinators in Greenhouse Tomato	Hadley	The **University of Massachusetts Amherst** will lead a project to use insectary plantings, such as sweet alyssum and sunflower, to test effectiveness on pest suppression and pollination services in tomatoes. This project will strengthen the greenhouse tomato industry in Massachusetts by 1) providing a formal experimental assessment of the efficacy of one established and one novel insectary plant on biocontrol agents and pollinators, 2) assessing the value of insectary plants in both rural and urban farm settings, and 3) developing and delivering extension materials about the costs and benefits of insectary plants in greenhouse tomato production.	$79,684.00
Gone with the Wind: Tracking Off-Target Pesticide Drift from Unmanned Aerial Systems	Hadley	The **University of Massachusetts** Cranberry Station will conduct research to quantify off-target pesticide drift from Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) applications. The project team will use the data to inform cranberry and specialty crop growers to understand risks, and with the State's Division of Crop and Pest Services, help inform a regulatory framework for UAS pesticide applications in Massachusetts.	$73,355.48

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT
Funds Awarded to State: $2,640,404.94 ● Number of Subawards: 22

The Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 7 research projects, 2 education and outreach projects, 3 marketing projects, and 10 projects that cross more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including apples, asparagus, beans, blueberries, Christmas trees, herbs, mushrooms, and grapes throughout the State of Michigan.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Regenerative Specialty Crop Producers Program: Training, Mentorship & Market Expansion for Northern Michigan	Bellaire	**Crosshatch Center for Art and Ecology** will enhance specialty crop competitiveness by delivering comprehensive producer training in regenerative production practices, market development, and environmental sustainability. The project focuses on high-value specialty crops such as mushrooms, flowers, and herbs, with a particular emphasis on regenerative agriculture techniques, season extension, and value-added processing.	$125,000.17
Great Lakes Winegrape Market Intelligence and Climate-Responsive Market Development Program	Traverse City	**Intentional Agriculture** will enhance market opportunities for Michigan winegrape growers by collecting and analyzing growing and sourcing data across all five of the state's American Viticultural Areas, and among targeted Great Lakes buyers, to facilitate strategic matchmaking between sellers and buyers at the annual Dirt to Glass Conference in 2027 and 2028.	$119,128.00
Cultivating Choice: Building Demand for Michigan Specialty Crops through Nutrition Education and Marketing	Grand Rapids	**Kids' Food Basket**, a regional food distribution organization and farm, will launch Cultivating Choice, a two-year initiative designed to increase nutrition and technical knowledge of Michigan specialty crops among at least 2,300 youth and adults through hands-on education, marketing, and expanded access to locally grown produce. The project aims to strengthen food security and build demand for locally grown produce across Kent and Muskegon counties.	$124,997.00
Social Media and Influencer Marketing to Increase Consumption of Michigan Apples	Lansing	The **Michigan Apple Committee** will conduct a social media marketing campaign leveraging influencer marketing and social media posts to increase engagement. This campaign will feature influencers, home chefs, and food enthusiasts highlighting the versatility of apples, recipes, and encouraging consumers to purchase more Michigan apples.	$125,000.00
Spring Ritual: Building Demand through Digital + Live Engagement	Okemos	The **Michigan Asparagus Advisory Board** will launch a "Spring Ritual" marketing campaign to boost Michigan-grown asparagus using digital marketing, coordinated retail programs, new video content, influencer and media outreach, and enhanced in-store materials to strengthen placement, shopper engagement, and seasonal consumption.	$125,000.00
Improving Management of Herbicide-Resistant Weeds in Asparagus	Okemos	**Michigan Asparagus Research Inc.** will research and evaluate weed management and seed return practices for asparagus production, including the application of herbicides and hydromulches as tools to suppress weed emergence throughout extended harvest seasons.	$125,000.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Identification and Sustainable Management of Herbicide-Resistant Weeds in Dry Bean Production Systems	Frankenmuth	The **Michigan Bean Commission (MBC)** will work with Michigan State University to conduct research to address herbicide-resistant weed control challenges in dry bean production systems. MBC will use its strong connections with growers and dry bean shippers to help translate research findings into applied cost-effective integrated pest management strategies that support long-term production sustainability. These efforts will help identify management concerns and support grassroots outreach and education activities.	$35,012.00
Increasing Demand for Michigan Dry Beans	Frankenmuth	The **Michigan Bean Commission** will work to enhance market opportunities for Michigan dry bean producers with this project leveraging MSU applied research on genetic resources and modern plant breeding techniques to improve commercially available varieties. The work will help address industry-identified needs to focus on more market segments benefiting from a stable supply chain of premium beans.	$124,979.00
Developing New Solutions for Michigan's New Disease Problems on Carrots	Okemos	The **Michigan Carrot Committee (MCC)**, in cooperation with Michigan State University, will conduct a project that will support the long-term economic and environmental sustainability of state carrot production by developing and implementing advanced disease strategies for growers, including effective fungicides and biologicals. MCC will evaluate registered fungicides, newly developed but unregistered fungicides, and biorational products in field trials to control foliar blight and root rot to protect yields and maintain carrot quality. The project will disseminate research findings and management recommendations to growers for implementation into production systems and decision-making.	$124,733.00
Field Research to Test Disease Solutions	Hudsonville	**Michigan Celery Research (MCR)** will identify effective field-based management strategies aimed at reducing damage caused by the newly discovered variant of fusarium oxysporum in celery that has caused extensive crop loss in California and Florida. MCR and its partner researchers will communicate findings to the state's growers through established extension methods to limit the impact of this destructive pathogen on Michigan's celery industry.	$123,603.00
International and Domestic Promotion of Michigan Specialty Crops Through Domestic and International Trade Shows and Matchmaking Meetings	Lansing	The **Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development** International Marketing Program will work with several Michigan specialty crop commodity groups to promote Michigan specialty crops domestically and internationally. These groups include the Michigan Apple Committee, the Michigan Asparagus Advisory Board, the Michigan Bean Commission, the Michigan Blueberry Commission, the Michigan Potato Industry Commission, and the Michigan Vegetable Council. The project will increase awareness through opportunities for connections and sales to be made by attending trade shows and through buyer/supplier matchmaking meetings.	$147,407.47
Searching for Solutions to a Persistent Pest: Grape Berry Moth Control Using New Approaches	Baroda	The **Michigan Grape Society** will support entomologists and extension educators from Michigan State University in evaluating novel integrated pest management strategies to control grape berry moth in Michigan vineyards. Project results will be delivered to 300 grape growers across Michigan through educational programs, to support 30% lower pest infestation, 10% greater yields, and overall improved vineyard profitability.	$124,966.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Developing Greenhouse Acclimatization Protocols for Ornamental Tissue Culture Plantlets	Lansing	The **Michigan Greenhouse Growers Council** will partner with researchers at Michigan State University to develop strategies that successfully acclimate ornamental tissue culture plantlets in greenhouses. A direct project outcome includes establishment of guidelines for acclimating high-value plantlets, reducing losses, and improving the quality and profitability of young plant producers.	$121,000.00
Michigan Herbs and Spices Toolkit	Flint	The **Michigan Herbs and Spices Toolkit initiative** aims to expand Michigan's herb and spice production while promoting these crops as flavorful, healthy alternatives to sodium and sugar. The project will engage roughly 15 farmers, 100 youth, and food entrepreneurs statewide through workshops, technical training, and product development activities. Key deliverables with its partners include a Michigan Herbs and Spices Toolkit, a series of educational videos featuring youth and a chef, and the launch of a website, michiganherbsandspices.com, to showcase Michigan-grown products and marketing resources.	$48,235.00
Determining Weed Control Efficiency of Biochar in Container Ornamental Production	Okemos	The **Michigan Nursery and Landscape Association**, working with Michigan State University, will research how to help nursery and greenhouse growers improve their productivity and profitability by determining the weed control efficacy of biochar in Michigan container-grown ornamentals. Results will be disseminated to stakeholders through grower meetings and field days.	$125,000.00
Expanding Weed Management Options in Onions Using Directed-Energy Technologies	St. Johns	The **Michigan Onion Committee**, in cooperation with Michigan State University, will improve weed management resilience, labor efficiency, and farm profitability in onion production in three ways. It will evaluate post-emergence electrical weed control for management of difficult-to-control weeds such as yellow nutsedge and white campion; evaluate soil-applied pulsed electric field technologies to suppress perennial weeds and reduce long-term infestations; and disseminate results through field demonstrations, extension publications, and grower outreach.	$122,999.00
Strengthening Soil Health to Support Climate Resilience in Potato Production Systems Along a Regenerative Management Gradient	East Lansing	**Michigan Potato Industry Commission** will conduct a project that will evaluate how potato production management practices influence soil health, organic matter dynamics, nutrient retention, and crop performance. Controlled experiments at Michigan State University will assess the effects of fumigation, tillage, compost application, and cover crop termination timing, while complementary on-farm sampling will be conducted across 50 commercial potato fields spanning Michigan's major production areas. Results will identify strategies that enhance productivity and resilience while quantifying the economic implications of soil health mediated changes in potato systems.	$124,992.00
Evaluating Novel Weed Management Technologies for Regenerative Apple and Blueberry Production #2	Benton Harbor	The **Michigan State Horticultural Society**, in cooperation with MSU, will advance regenerative weed management practices that improve soil health, reduce chemical inputs, and strengthen the long-term resilience of Michigan blueberry and apple production systems. This includes evaluating sensor-based sprayers for reducing herbicide use while maintaining effective weed control, evaluating electrical weed control as a non-chemical option that minimizes soil disturbance, and disseminating results through field days, extension publications, videos, and grower meetings.	$124,638.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Improving Sustainability of Christmas Tree and Conifer Nursery Production through Adaptive Selection and Irrigation Strategies	Durand	This collaborative project between **Michigan State University** and the **Michigan Christmas Tree Association** will develop both short-term solutions, such as improved irrigation practices, and long-term approaches like genetic selection, to help Michigan Christmas tree growers manage the increasing risks posed by more variable weather and more frequent, intense droughts.	$124,401.00
Enviroweather Network Expansion to Improve Weather-based Decisions by Michigan Blueberry Growers	Grand Junction	**Michigan State University (MSU)** entomologists and extension educators, as well as MSU Enviroweather, will collaborate on this project to increase MSU Enviroweather coverage by adding five new weather monitoring locations in West Central Michigan. This will expand Michigan's only agriculture-focused weather network to reach areas of high crop production that are currently without local weather data.	$124,174.00
Cultivating Local Food Systems in the Upper Peninsula	Ishpeming	**Partridge Creek Farm (PCF)** will conduct a project to strengthen K–12 agricultural education and Farm to School growing capacity through enhanced gardens, hands-on programming, career pathways, and expanded local procurement. PCF aims to provide regional leadership by training educators, supporting food service staff, and creating a scalable model for integrating fresh, locally grown foods into school meals.	$117,205.00
Small Scale Fruit Tree Establishment on Small Holding Regenerative Farms for Food Security	Idlewild	**Soul Blossom Farm LLC** will lead a collaborative project to establish a demonstration fruit tree system on two small holding regenerative farms. Work includes providing training through hands-on workshops and developing best-practice guides for small growers to strengthen local food security and improved environmental stewardship across Michigan.	$32,950.00

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $1,772,402.74 ● Number of Subawards: 15

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 2 research projects, 8 education and outreach projects, 2 marketing projects, and 3 projects that cross more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including soybean, black walnut, apples, potato, and dry bean throughout the State of Minnesota.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Expanding Market Access and Aggregation for Food as Medicine Specialty Crops in Minnesota	Minnetonka	**Friendly Hmong Farms** will lead a specialty crop aggregation and market access project to strengthen post-harvest handling, distribution, and market readiness for Minnesota-grown specialty crops that contribute to the growing food-as-medicine market. This work will access additional, currently untapped markets resulting in increased sales, reduced crop loss, and expanded access to wholesale, institutional, and community markets.	$112,125.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Investing in Rural Agriculture through Group Purchasing	Falcon Heights	The **Good Acre** will increase local food purchasing in Minnesota by forming a group purchasing organization (GPO) with five institutions in South Minnesota. The GPO will streamline menu planning and local procurement through The Good Acre. The project also intends to create a roadmap for other rural regions in the state to adopt and form GPOs, bolstering produce farmers and connecting more rural communities with fresh, local foods.	$122,843.91
Evaluating Dormant Tuber Testing to Supplement Winter Grow Out for Seed Potato Certification	Saint Paul	**Minnesota Department of Agriculture** Plant Protection Division will assess the potential for use of molecular dormant tuber testing (DTT) as a potential alternative or supplement to its current method of using winter grow outs and ELISA testing (enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay, a common test to detect proteins, antibodies, antigens, and hormones) for its state seed potato certification program. Based on comparisons of viral infection levels and costs, this work will determine if DTT is a reliable alternative to winter grow outs. Results will be shared with potato growers at grower events, and through online and print publications.	$115,828.00
FSMA Produce Safety Rule Grower Training	Saint Paul	The **Minnesota Department of Agriculture** (MDA) will support Minnesota produce growers by offering affordable Food Safety Modernization Act Produce Safety Rule (PSR) trainings that help farms implement safe produce handling practices and protect public health. The MDA will increase the total number of PSR trainings available to Minnesota farmers and explore options for greater financial sustainability by piloting new collaboration methods with other states.	$15,000.00
Increasing Consumer Access to Minnesota Grown Specialty Crops through Online Promotion	Saint Paul	The **Minnesota Department of Agriculture**, through its Minnesota Grown program, will promote and expand access to specialty crop producers through targeted paid search advertising, and through search engine optimization and generative engine optimization. These strategies will significantly contribute to the visibility of Minnesota Grown specialty crops among search results, driving consumers to the Minnesota Grown Directory where they can easily find and purchase products from local farms.	$95,700.00
Expanding Markets for New Specialty Crops in Southcentral Minnesota	Mankato	The **Region Nine Development Commission** will partner with the Living Earth Center's Beginning Farmer Program to develop market opportunities for specialty crops that historically have not been available in south central Minnesota. The Commission will work with this group of farmers to help them develop their businesses to ensure compliance with all local, state, and federal produce sales requirements. This will include education on organic farming practices and food safety from the Commission's farm education contractor and community farm manager, and other relevant partners.	$125,000.00
Improving Germination and Vigor of Hard Fescue for Minnesota Seed Producers and Turfgrass Lawns	Saint Paul	The **University of Minnesota** will improve hard fescue seed production and lawn establishment through the development of agronomic approaches to improve seedling vigor along with plant breeding to develop improved cultivars. This project aims to deliver benefits to both Minnesota turf seed producers and the consumers who purchase Minnesota-grown hard fescue seed.	$124,382.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Minnesota Specialty Dry Beans: Increasing Market Demand and Expanding Production	Minneapolis	**Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota** will increase access to and sales of specialty dry beans by educating consumers with classes and demonstrations on their uses and benefits and educating and supporting growers with targeted events, a growers networking group, and market directory. The project aims to boost Minnesota's specialty bean production by recruiting growers, including new and emerging farmers, and training them on best growing and marketing practices and expanding markets and supply chains, to fulfill the increased consumer demand that the project will stimulate.	$101,502.50
Value Added Specialty Crops: A Food Safety Training Program for Small to Mid-size Producers	Minneapolis	The **University of Minnesota** Extension will advance specialty crop markets statewide by providing food safety-focused value-added training for farmers and consumer education that increases awareness, trust, and consumption of specialty crops. This project will deliver in-person training programs that combine technical food safety education with real-world experience shared by farmers engaged in value-added production. Focus groups will be conducted at the conclusion of each workshop to gather participant feedback on training effectiveness and identify opportunities for improvement. Consumer education will be delivered through both in-person and online outreach.	$66,671.00
Updating Minnesota's High Tunnel Production Manual and Reviving the Annual High Tunnel Conference	Minneapolis	The **University of Minnesota** Extension will support high tunnel (HT) fruit and vegetable producers by rewriting the Minnesota HT manual with updated research, new best practices, improved accessibility, and reviving a popular annual HT conference. These educational tools will help growers improve production and profitability of a wide range of specialty crops, thus enhancing the overall success and competitiveness of Minnesota's specialty crop industry.	$94,093.00
Leafy African Vegetables in Minnesota: Releasing New Varieties via Participatory Plant Breeding	Minneapolis	Promising accessions of four leafy African vegetables will be evaluated by the **University of Minnesota** and local growers in a participatory breeding scheme, and the best accessions will be released as new plant varieties. The University will conduct replicated field tests of the most promising accessions and engage local growers and the broader scientific community through field days.	$124,824.00
Genetic Study of Soybean Cyst Nematode Resistance in Common Bean (Phaseolus vulgaris) and Breeding	Minneapolis	While dry bean acreage is rising in Minnesota, soybean cyst nematode (SCN) threatens its production and no resistant cultivars exist. This **University of Minnesota** project will identify SCN resistance genes and develop elite, high-yielding dry bean lines using genomic tools. The outcomes of this study will advance essential knowledge for breeding SCN-resistant cultivars using molecular tools and for developing effective management strategies for SCN in dry bean production.	$125,000.00
Black Walnut Byproducts: Mulch for Weed Control in Nursery Production	Minneapolis	The **University of Minnesota** will evaluate the feasibility of using locally available black walnut byproducts as a mulch-based weed management tool for nursery production. Project findings will be translated into science-based, practical guidance through extension fact sheets, field demonstrations, and educational programming delivered in collaboration with the University of Minnesota Extension.	$125,000.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Shared Markets: Evaluating and Advancing Market Opportunities for Specialty Crop Aggregation	Minneapolis	**University of Minnesota** Extension Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships will strengthen farm stands that aggregate specialty crops by studying efficiency, licensing, marketing, and delivering best practices that expand market access and agritourism opportunities for Minnesota growers. Providing aggregation enterprises with data-informed tools and best practices will enhance the competitiveness of Minnesota specialty crops by improving market access, strengthening shared retail models, and supporting long-term viability for producers and rural communities.	$125,000.00
Post-Harvest Protection of Minnesota Apples by Novel Smart NIPU Edible Coating from Potato Residuals	Minneapolis	The **University of Minnesota** will develop smart antimicrobial non-isocyanate polyurethane (NIPU) edible coatings derived from Minnesota potato residuals to improve post-harvest protection and shelf life of Minnesota apples. This project aims to transform potato residuals into biodegradable NIPU edible coatings and composite films for apple preservation. Project activities will include potato residual characterization, polymer synthesis, coating fabrication, antimicrobial validation, and refrigerated storage studies on coated Minnesota apples.	$124,999.00

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND COMMERCE
Funds Awarded to State: $500,554.70 ● Number of Subawards: 10

The Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 4 research projects, 5 education and outreach projects, and 1 marketing project to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including sweet potatoes, passionfruit, watermelons, melons, Christmas trees and vines throughout Mississippi.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Freshly Picked: Educating Mississippians on Specialty Crops	Jackson	The **Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce** Market Development Division will expand its Freshly Picked: Educating Mississippians on Specialty Crops campaign by developing a new statewide promotional video and hosting a series of monthly educational events at farmers markets across Mississippi. The project aims to increase awareness, consumption, and understanding of Mississippi-grown specialty crops by engaging consumers through targeted, hands-on education and outreach.	$48,000.00
Mississippi School and Community Gardens	Jackson	To increase awareness and consumption of Mississippi specialty crops, the **Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce** will increase educational efforts through school and community garden grants that start or expand upon an existing school or community garden.	$22,500.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Advancing a Vision-Guided Robotic Sweet Potato Harvester with Cluster-Aware Manipulation and an Integrated Smart Devining Mechanism	Starkville	**Mississippi State University (MSU)** will partner with local farmers to improve the efficiency of sweet potato harvesting while minimizing the need for manual labor. The project aims to 1) create a deviner mechanism to separate sweet potato roots from vines, and 2) integrate the deviner mechanism into MSU's current robotic sweet potato harvester, perform necessary modifications, and conduct laboratory and field tests. Research findings will be disseminated to stakeholders and the wider scientific community through field days, extension publications, peer-reviewed articles, electronic newsletters, websites, and social media platforms.	$80,000.00
Establishing a Peer-to-Peer Training Model for Controlled Environment Specialty Crop Production in Mississippi	Crystal Springs	**Mississippi State University** and the Alliance of Sustainable Farms will increase the adoption of Controlled Environment Agriculture (CEA) by using hydroponic microgreens as a low-barrier model to develop and disseminate technical CEA protocols. These protocols will include nutrient management, climate control, and soilless cultivation, to be transferable to a wide range of specialty crops through a statewide peer-to-peer training network.	$57,211.00
Improving Herbicide Safety and Weed Control Timing in Watermelon Production in Mississippi	Mississippi State	**Mississippi State University** will evaluate practical herbicide use strategies that improve weed control while minimizing crop injury in watermelon systems, a challenge facing Mississippi growers. Specifically, the study will conduct field trials to compare different application methods, including broadcast, directed, and shielded spraying, to determine how herbicides can be applied more safely and effectively. The results will be translated into simple, grower-friendly recommendations and clear guidelines to expand growers' weed management options, reduce reliance on hand weeding, and improve production efficiency, profitability, and sustainability.	$41,096.00
Assessing Emerging Pumpkin Pest Management Issues: Melon Severe Mosaic Virus Incidence and Thrips Threshold Determination	Raymond	**Mississippi State University** will mitigate the spread of melon severe mosaic virus and the impact of thrips in pumpkins in Mississippi by evaluating infestation levels and corresponding injury in sentinel plots. This work will inform development of disease and insect management recommendations based on action thresholds. Researchers will disseminate results to stakeholders through producer meetings and new extension resources that will be shared during in-person consultations and electronically.	$45,401.00
Project: AI-Enabled Crop Assessment and Harvest Scheduling for Mississippi Specialty Crops	Mississippi State	**Mississippi State University's** Agricultural Autonomy Institute, in partnership with the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station, will develop and evaluate artificial intelligence (AI)-based crop assessment tools for Mississippi specialty crop producers. Using unmanned aerial vehicle-based imaging systems, the research team will collect imagery from commercial production fields and develop annotated datasets for AI model development. These datasets will be used to develop and evaluate computer vision models capable of identifying crop structures and assessing crop distribution within production fields.	$35,793.32

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Redefining Sweet Potato Skin Strength	Pontotoc	**Mississippi State University** will conduct research to better evaluate and quantify sweet potato skin strength. In using new spectroscopy technology, physical skin sheer strength evaluations, and traditional cross-sectional staining to determine lignin thickness, the project aims to develop and validate a tangible tool available for growers to use to determine skin strength. Researchers anticipate growers will use this tool to make more informed decisions about when to harvest and pack sweet potatoes to minimize skinning damage and prolong shelf life.	$68,348.00
A Taste of the Tropics: Evaluating Hybrid Passionfruit for Mississippi Production	Poplarville	**Mississippi State University** will evaluate advanced selections of hybrid passionfruit for suitability of public release. During the project, vines will be evaluated at two Mississippi locations; data will be taken regarding vine growth, productivity, and fruit quality; and potential growers will be educated via field days, extension publications, and informal surveys.	$30,285.00
Determining Optimal Fertility Methods for Mississippi Grown Leyland Cypress Christmas Trees	Verona	**Mississippi State University Extension** will increase producer awareness and knowledge of Christmas tree production through further research and educational/demonstration efforts with the North Mississippi Research and Extension Center. The project aims to help inform producer choices with knowledge of proper installation, maintenance, and production practices (fertility) when growing Christmas trees, and to become more successful in grower operations.	$26,393.00

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $507,607.96 ● Number of Subawards: 10

The Missouri Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 6 research projects and 4 education projects to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including grapes, elderberries, blackberries, cut flowers, and other fruits and vegetables throughout the State of Missouri.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Establishing Pruning Standards for the New Norton Blanc Cultivar	Springfield	**Missouri State University** will establish balanced pruning standards for the Norton Blanc grape cultivar through two years of applied vineyard research. The project will evaluate vine capacity and multiple bud load treatments under Missouri growing conditions using pruning weight measurements, phenology observations, yield data, cold injury assessments, and berry chemistry analysis to develop management recommendations.	$46,600.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Breeding 'Vignoles' Grapevines for Improved Resistance to Powdery Mildew	Springfield	**Missouri State University** will introgress powdery mildew resistance into 'Vignoles' grapes by developing a mapping population, constructing a high-density linkage map, conducting high-throughput phenotyping, and identifying quantitative trait loci (QTLs). Findings will be disseminated to growers and scientists at the annual Show-Me Grape and Wine Conference. This detailed genetic mapping will provide the foundation for associating DNA markers with powdery mildew resistance. Integrating effective genetic resistance into grape cultivars would reduce reliance on chemical inputs.	$49,693.00
Evaluating RCA Trellis Training Methods and Production of Two New Blackberry Cultivars	Springfield	**Missouri State University** will evaluate, through in-field research, the effects of four cane training methods on plant growth, yield, berry quality, and mitigation of frost, cold and heat damage on two new blackberry cultivars grown on a Rotating Cross-Arm trellis system. The project will provide Missouri growers with updated blackberry production information through workshops, field days, and conferences.	$37,514.70
Harvesting Healthy Habits Through Youth Specialty Crop Education	St. Louis	**New Roots Urban Farm** will implement a 24-month specialty crop education initiative designed to increase child nutrition knowledge, specialty crop familiarity, and specialty crop consumption among children and families throughout the St. Louis region. Collaboration with schools and youth-serving organizations throughout St. Louis City and County will support outreach and participant engagement. Educational materials, recipes, nutrition resources, and project findings will be shared with schools, families, educators, and community organizations to increase awareness of seasonal specialty crops and healthy eating habits.	$43,417.23
Development of Stable Elderberry-Derived Natural Colorants for Clean-Label Bakery Applications	Statewide	**Pittsburg State University** in Pittsburg, Kansas, will optimize a sustainable, scalable process for extracting and stabilizing natural colorants from Missouri-grown elderberries (Sambucus canadensis). Deliverables include a green extraction protocol utilizing subcritical water and ethanol, a highly stable natural colorant powder, and validated commercial bakery formulations demonstrating the successful integration of the colorant into clean-label icings, fruit fillings, and coatings.	$49,935.38
Identifying, Analyzing, and Evaluating Lost American Heritage Grapes	Hermann	**Stone Hill Wine Co**. aims to rediscover "lost" pre-Prohibition grape cultivars by identifying and sampling remnant pre-Prohibition grapevines, analyzing the identified grapevines through DNA analysis and morphology, and evaluating the viability of these varieties through eventual establishment in a trial vineyard.	$37,653.50
Building Extension Capacity to Meet Irrigation Management Needs to Missouri Specialty Crop Growers	Columbia	The **University of Missouri** Extension will optimize irrigation water use and management practices by building extension capacity through activities such as training extension field specialists, creating tools, publications, resources, and delivering online and in-person training events targeting farmers. Approximately 17 University of Missouri and five Lincoln University Extension specialists will be trained in current irrigation management technologies and equipped with demonstration units to assist them with local farmer outreach.	$47,078.05

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Expanding Market Access Through GAP Certification and Produce Safety Assistance	Columbia	The **University of Missouri** Extension will provide targeted training for Extension specialists to assist growers in preparing for audits, implementing food safety practices, and navigating wholesale market requirements. It will also provide regulatory education for farms seeking certification and who must comply with the Food Safety Modernization Act Preventive Controls for Human Food Rule for the development of value-added food products, alongside a cost-share program to support growers seeking Good Agricultural Practices certification.	$55,220.46
Resilient and Season-Extended Farming Systems for Small-Scale Specialty Crop Producers	Columbia	The **University of Missouri** will develop and demonstrate self-reliant technology solutions in water management, weed and pest control that address key challenges faced by small-scale producers of leafy greens, vegetables, and cut flowers. The project will generate practical design guidelines and make them freely available to producers across the state. A real-time irrigation scheduling app will also be developed for multiple specialty crop varieties.	$49,965.00
Enhancing Extension Educators' Capacity to Educate and Assist Cut Flower Growers	Columbia	The **University of Missouri** Extension will implement a statewide training initiative to strengthen the capacity of Extension educators to support and educate cut flower growers across Missouri. This project will equip 20 Extension educators with the knowledge, tools, and resources needed to deliver effective, research-based education on cut flower production. Four regional demonstration gardens will be developed and located across Missouri. These sites will serve as hands-on learning environments for both educator training and grower outreach, showcasing practical production techniques relevant to Missouri growing conditions.	$49,922.00

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $3,259,379.87 ● Number of Subawards: 13

The Montana Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 2 research projects, 3 education and outreach projects, 2 marketing projects, and 6 projects that cross more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including lentils, peas, chickpeas, dry beans, potatoes, cherries, and other fruits and vegetables throughout the State of Montana.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Enhancing Montana Specialty Crop Competitiveness through Scaled Processing and Distribution for Institutions	Ronan	**Lake County Community Development Corporation** will leverage a regional community of food hubs and partners to expand market access and distribution channels for producers to increase their profitability and create a more resilient food economy. This project will invest in statewide supply chain infrastructure by connecting specialty crop producers to food hubs and identifying value-added processing opportunities of specialty crops that will connect producers to institutional buyers.	$200,152.47

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Specialty Crop New International Market Access and Development	Helena	**Montana Department of Agriculture** will promote Montana specialty crops at four international trade shows per year for three years. The immediate goal of this effort is to help Montana specialty crops access and develop new markets in Europe and Asia. The project's long-term goal is to identify markets that would benefit from a "whole of the supply chain" market development approach.	$75,000.00
Hola Montana Downstream Branded Market Development for Montana Pulses in Latin America	Helena	**Montana Department of Agriculture** will expand Hola Montana, a branded market development campaign for pulses in Latin America, to create branded promotions in retail, wholesale, and hotel, restaurant and institution sectors. Through branded marketing activities in the downstream supply chain, this project aims to create success for pulse importers, first purchasers/exporters, and U.S. farmers.	$157,950.00
Specialty Crop Grader Training	Great Falls	The **Montana Department of Agriculture** State Grain Lab will develop and certify at least one specialty crop grader to enable readiness for operational deployment, improving grading capacity, and strengthening service reliability for producers, primarily for Montana's leading production of pulse crops.	$371,201.00 *Project pending*
Winter Pea Integration for Diversified and Resilient Pulse Production Systems	Huntley	**Montana State University** will conduct winter pea research to focus on the specific management practices needed to maximize yield from locally developed Montana varieties without increasing production costs. This project will identify the best seeding rates, inoculation practices, planting dates, and weed management strategies to establish strong stands, suppress weeds, and maximize yield. Results will be shared directly with producers through field days, extension publications, and grower meetings.	$306,871.00
On-Farm and Multi Site Validation of Zinc Management of Montana Dry Peas	Conrad	**Montana State University** will lead and execute a multi-site research and outreach project to validate zinc optimal application rates best management practices in dry pea production to improve drought resilience, yield stability, and competitiveness. Results will be disseminated through field days, producer meetings, extension publications, peer-review publications, and presentations to producer organizations and conferences.	$194,004.00
Creating Montana Adapted Determinate Growth Early Maturing Chickpeas	Bozeman	**Montana State University** (MSU) will support Montana chickpea growers by developing determinate varieties suited to the region's short, variable season. This will include reducing delayed maturity and reliance on desiccants to improve harvest efficiency, cut costs, and lower chemical exposure. Reducing growers' need for chemical desiccation through improved genetics represents a sustainable and economically beneficial solution, and results will be integrated into the MSU pulse breeding program to ensure rapid application of findings to benefit growers.	$236,371.00
Screening Pea Germplasm for Resistance to Aphanomyces Root Rot	Bozeman	**Montana State University** will 1) screen dry pea germplasm with resistance or tolerance to Aphanomyces root rot, 2) analyze how winter pea varieties respond to Aphanomyces under different inoculation conditions, and 3) test alternative synthetic and biological seed treatments for their efficacy against this pathogen. The information gathered will be disseminated to stakeholders at grower meetings and field days.	$114,024.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
AI-Enabled UAV Surveillance for Early Detection of PVY In Montana Seed Potatoes	Bozeman	**Montana State University** will work in partnership with Montana seed potato producers and extension specialists to develop and validate an unmanned arial vehicle (UAV)-based early detection and decision-support system for Potato virus Y (PVY) in Montana seed potato production. This project will develop and validate uncertainty-aware PVY risk mapping tailored to Montana seed potato systems, including standard operating procedures for flight planning, calibration, data preprocessing, and map generation. The project team will engage with Montana seed potato growers to involve them in procedure development and validation, annually participate in the Montana Seed Potato Seminar to disseminate results to stakeholders, and disseminate results through peer-reviewed conference and journal publications.	$333,901.00
Education Partnerships to Support Innovation and Marketing of Montana Specialty Crops	Bozeman	The **Montana State University** Food Product Development Lab will develop innovative consumer engagement workshops to enhance specialty crop stakeholders' market expansion capacity. The developed workshop materials and recordings will be shared digitally with state-wide specialty crop stakeholders and can be customized to each organization's focused specialty crops.	$295,120.00
A Dry Bean Disease Survey for Eastern Montana Irrigated Farmers	Sidney	**Montana State University** Eastern Agricultural Research Center will lead a project to assess dry bean diseases and strengthen disease management education for eastern Montana producers. This project will document disease incidence and severity in irrigated dry bean fields and translate findings into practical, research-based educational resources.	$174,470.00
Identifying Major Diseases Affecting Cherry Production in Montana	Bozeman	**Montana State University** will conduct a survey of disease prevalence and soil health across the state's cherry production regions. The project will provide growers with data-driven mitigation strategies to reduce orchard damage and improve cherry yield and quality. Findings will be disseminated through grower meetings, site visits, and publications.	$145,779.00
Mapping Montana's Indigenous Rhizobia Populations and Identifying Effective Rhizobia for Dry Bean	Sidney	**Montana State University** will address critical issues for a viable specialty crop to substitute 40,000 annual acres of sugar beet following the closure of a processing facility in eastern Montana by mapping the Rhizobia populations present in dry bean land, including those that best enable biological nitrogen fixation. The project will survey dry bean lands to identify these populations, test response of dry beans to different Rhizobia from different parts of Montana and educate growers on effective Rhizobia inoculation and nitrogen management. This identification of effective Rhizobia can reduce nitrogen fertilizer input needs and thus increase profitability. Results will be presented to growers annually as well as at grower meetings and scientific conferences.	$296,005.00

NEBRASKA STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $851,946.25 ● Number of Subawards: 13

The Nebraska State Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 11 research projects and 2 education and outreach projects to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including winter pea, grapes, Palmer amaranth, sweet corn, cowpea, and confectionary sunflower throughout the State of Nebraska.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Framework for Farm Sustainability	Raymond	**Capriolo Farm** will evaluate the economic viability of native cover crops for vineyard floor management. An emphasis will be placed on improving ecosystem health while orienting around profitability under local conditions. The project will focus on a multi-year field experiment measuring both ecological benefits and financial outcomes, synthesize results into practical decision-making tools for others to leverage, and share findings with the public through field days, lectures, and articles.	$69,261.00
Adding a "Preemptive Strike" to the Battle Against Japanese Beetles	Lexington	**Mac's Creek Vineyards** will compare chemical and non-chemical pesticide strategies, including essential oils and biological controls, for managing Japanese beetle infestations in Nebraska vineyards while expanding prior research in this project. This work introduces a "pre-emptive strike" approach that targets both larval (grub) populations below ground and adult beetles in the canopy to improve control effectiveness and reduce reliance on conventional chemical applications. Results with actionable recommendations to improve pest management will be disseminated through grower workshops, extension publications, and/or field demonstrations.	$69,720.00
Trade Show for Nebraska Specialty Crop Associations	Lincoln	The **Nebraska Department of Agriculture**, in a contractual relationship with Nebraska specialty crop associations participating in the Americas Food & Beverage Show & Conference in Miami, Fla. in 2027, will support travel to exhibit at this event to support greater awareness, marketability, and competitiveness of Nebraska specialty crops.	$10,000.00
Spring and Winter Pea Productivity and Profitability under Dryland in Western Nebraska	Scottsbluff	The **University of Nebraska–Lincoln** will conduct a project to evaluate pea productivity in Nebraska dryland crop rotation. The project will focus on 1) evaluating spring and winter pea productivity in the dryland crop rotation, 2) estimating nitrogen fixation, weed pressure, water-use efficiency, and critical soil health parameters after pea harvest, and 3) estimating the profit of integrating spring and winter pea in the dryland production system. These results will be shared at the annual Crop Production Clinics, via CropWatch, on field days, and at farmer meetings.	$76,715.00
Integrated Management of Herbicide-Resistant Palmer Amaranth and Volunteer Corn in Popcorn: Research and Extension	Lincoln	The **University of Nebraska–Lincoln** will lead a research and extension project designed to improve Palmer amaranth and volunteer corn management in popcorn production systems in Nebraska. Expected outcomes include improved Palmer amaranth and volunteer corn management options, reduced reliance on herbicides, improved soil health, and increased profitability for popcorn producers.	$73,841.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Reliable or Risky? Screening Biostimulants for Specialty Crop Transplant Production	Lincoln	The **University of Nebraska–Lincoln** will evaluate the efficacy of biostimulants for specialty crop seedling transplant production and develop a decision-support tool for comparing the costs and benefits of these products—the reproducibility of biostimulant benefits by product, product type or active ingredient, crop type, and production system when applied to crop seedling transplants. The team will also develop an AI chatbot decision-support tool for evaluating the cost/benefit of commercially available biostimulants. Research findings will be shared with at least 30 industry representatives and other stakeholders, with field days and a research publication as well as sharing results at academic and grower conferences.	$79,927.00
Optimizing NPK to Improve Photosynthesis, Yield, and Profitability of Dry Pea	Scottsbluff	The **University of Nebraska–Lincoln** will evaluate how nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), and potassium (K) fertilization influences photosynthesis, yield, and profitability of dry pea production in western Nebraska. This project will provide practical, data-based guidance to improve productivity, reduce input costs, and promote sustainable dry pea production in Nebraska. Results will be shared widely using Nebraska extension resources such as field days, CropWatch, social media, and peer-reviewed publications.	$67,904.00
High-Yielding Food-Grade Winter Pea Varieties for Dryland Production System in Nebraska	Scottsbluff	The **University of Nebraska–Lincoln** will conduct a study to identify high-yielding winter pea varieties suitable for western Nebraska production to enhance the marketability, profitability, and competitiveness of the pulse crops industry in Nebraska. The newly developed knowledge will be disseminated through Nebraska extension outlets such as growers' meetings and field days, as well as through CropWatch, NebGuide, brochures, and newspaper articles.	$62,577.00
Cowpea Varieties for Dryland Production System in Western Nebraska	Scottsbluff	The **University of Nebraska–Lincoln** will generate seed yield data of commercially available cowpea varieties under dryland conditions in western Nebraska and identify high-yielding cowpea varieties suitable for these conditions. Production feasibility and availability of such varieties will enhance the marketability, profitability, and competitiveness of the pulse crops industry in Nebraska. The newly developed knowledge will be disseminated through Nebraska extension outlets (growers' meetings and field days), and publications (CropWatch, NebGuide, brochures, and newspaper articles).	$59,822.00
Evaluation of Sulfur Supplementation on Terminal Drought Tolerance in Dry Pea	Scottsbluff	The **University of Nebraska–Lincoln** will evaluate sulfur supplementation in improving terminal drought tolerance and yield stability of dry pea under western Nebraska conditions. This project will equip dry pea growers with practical nutrient management strategies for sulfur fertilization to improve drought resilience of dry pea and reduce yield losses. Deliverables will include data-based sulfur recommendations, extension materials, and peer-reviewed publications.	$76,179.00
Evaluation of Biopesticides for Seed-Feeding Pests Management in Confection Sunflower	Scottsbluff	The **University of Nebraska–Lincoln** Panhandle Research, Extension, and Education Center will develop a bloom-based bioassay in its greenhouse to evaluate biopesticides for major head and seed-feeding pests of confection sunflower, including red sunflower seed weevil (RSSW) and sunflower head moth (SHM).The long-term goal of this project is to optimize biopesticide tools as part of the integrated pest management program for RSSW and SHM in confection sunflower production by assessing compatibility with other practices, spraying timing and conditions, and non-target effects.	$51,379.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Developing Rust Resistant Sweet Corn Lines	Lincoln	The **University of Nebraska–Lincoln** (UNL) will develop new sweet corn lines resistant to common rust and southern corn rust. UNL has identified sweet corn hybrids with resistance to both corn rust isolates. Developing rust-resistant lines against the current rust isolates will directly enable farmers to incorporate resistance genes into current sweet corn breeding lines.	$58,759.00
Kochia Burndown in Confection Sunflower	Scottsbluff	The **University of Nebraska-Lincoln** will conduct a series of field trials to improve control of Acetolactate Synthase (ALS) and glyphosate-resistant kochia in no-till confectionary sunflower, compared to existing practices. Project results will be distributed through conventional extension methods (field days and online media), and study results will be primarily distributed through direct communication with the farmers in Nebraska who grow confectionary sunflowers.	$27,706.00

NEVADA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $375,103.80 ●Number of Subawards: 4

The Nevada Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 1 research project, 1 education and outreach project, 1 marketing project, and 1 project that crosses more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including grapes, honey, cantaloupe and lettuce throughout the State of Nevada.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Fallon Cantaloupe Festival Initiative Expanding Melon Cultivation, Farm Access, and Market Development through Strategic Initiative	Fallon	**Fallon Festival Association Inc.** will conduct a project designed to enhance the competitiveness of Nevada's specialty crop sector by expanding melon production, strengthening market access, and increasing consumer demand. Anchored in Fallon's cantaloupe region, this project benefits multiple growers across Nevada through coordinated production support, strategic market development, and targeted promotion. The initiative will connect growers with new and expanded market channels, including restaurants, farmers markets, schools, and institutional buyers.	$107,636.00
Increasing Specialty Crop Competitiveness with Climate-Adaptive Production for Southern Nevada	Las Vegas	**Gilcrease Orchard** will enhance Nevada's specialty crop competitiveness by conducting climate-resilience research on shade-adapted vegetables under a shade structure and full-sun desert melons to improve regional yields and crop quality. This will include disseminating results to at least 500 professional or amateur growers through field tours and digital resources.	$40,000.00
Nevada State Beekeepers Conference	Yerington	The **Mason Valley Beekeepers** will organize the 17th, 18th, and 19th annual Nevada State Beekeepers Conferences that inform, educate, and inspire beekeepers by securing speakers and presenters who provide the latest research and techniques to increase beekeeper knowledge and help mitigate colony losses.	$96,000.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Light Spectra Optimization for Improved Yield and Phytochemical Quality of Lettuce Varieties in an Indoor Hydroponic Vertical Farming System	Reno	**University of Nevada, Reno** researchers will develop lettuce varieties grown in an indoor hydroponic vertical farming system to enhance productivity, improve nutritional quality, increase energy-use efficiency, and reduce water use under Southern Nevada's arid desert conditions. The project team will disseminate production guidelines to growers through the Nevada Farm Network, platforms, workshops, and in-person training programs.	$92,015.87

NEW HAMPSHIRE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, MARKETS AND FOOD
Funds Awarded to State: $352,181.56 ● Number of Subawards: 5

The New Hampshire Department of Agriculture, Markets and Food will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 3 research projects, 1 education and outreach project, and 1 marketing project to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including apples, peaches, cherries, squash, and various fruits and vegetables throughout the State of New Hampshire.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Increasing the Competitiveness of Specialty Crops through Business and Technical Assistance	Walpole	The **Cheshire County Conservation District** will create a technical service provider network and directory to connect specialty crop producers to education, technical assistance, and financial assistance programs. This project will support specialty crop producers' long term farm viability, save valuable time, expand access to essential technical assistance, and lower farm input costs to ensure their continued profitability, statewide availability, and product market competitiveness.	$59,980.00
Buy New Hampshire Specialty Crops: Increasing Awareness Among NH Residents and Visitors by Utilizing the Natively NH Brand, in Partnership with NH	Concord	The **New Hampshire Department of Agriculture, Markets, and Food** will enhance consumer awareness and interest through the "Natively NH" marketing campaign. This initiative will include targeted social media campaigns and digital platforms that promote New Hampshire-grown specialty crops to tourists and state residents. This expanded public awareness of the state's local food system aims to encourage more residents and visitors to engage with New Hampshire farms and markets, and to generate sustained economic benefits for local specialty crop growers.	$99,906.04
Optimizing Year-Round Ventilation for High Tunnel Specialty Crop Production	Durham	**University of New Hampshire** researchers will conduct research to develop novel ventilation strategies and increase efficiencies for year-round high tunnel specialty crop production. By enhancing high tunnel ventilation, specialty crop growers will have more stable indoor environment conditions year-round without having to significantly change current tunnel infrastructure or technologies seasonally.	$64,032.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Updating the Pest and Resistance Baseline for New Hampshire Tree Fruit Production	Durham	Researchers at **University of New Hampshire** will survey commercial orchards and collect diseased tissue from apples, cherries, and peaches to update the New Hampshire pest and disease baseline for tree fruit production and share with growers to support effective management decisions. This information will also provide growers with practical information on which pathogens are present, whether resistance to pathogens is emerging, and how disease management programs can be adjusted.	$37,975.00
Beyond Pollination: Resilient Squash Production for High Tunnels and Open Fields	Durham	Researchers at **University of New Hampshire** will conduct field and high tunnel trials to identify summer squash varieties that can set fruit without fertilization, resulting in seedless or nearly seedless (parthenocarpic) varieties—and can perform reliably in New England production systems, such as in high tunnels and under row cover. Growers will be provided with practical variety recommendations to improve yields and extend the summer squash production season.	$62,114.00

NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded: $1,023,883.78 ● Number of Subawards: 18

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 6 research projects, 4 education and outreach projects, 4 marketing projects, and 4 projects that cross more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including apples, blueberries, cranberries, peaches, and tomatoes throughout the State of New Jersey.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
LoRaWAN Field Conditions Monitoring for New Jersey Specialty Crops: A South Jersey Blueberry Demonstration	Hammonton	**Anthony J. Berenato Farms** will demonstrate a low-cost field monitoring system that collects soil and weather data to help New Jersey blueberry and specialty crop growers make informed production decisions. The multi-farm project will demonstrate a practical, low-cost model for field-level specialty crop decision support and develop a public platform where other New Jersey growers can learn how to install compatible monitoring nodes and potentially contribute data to the shared network.	$32,750.00
Growing the NJ Hazelnut Industry: Grower Education, Technical Support, and Food Safety Pathways	Ringoes	**Avellana Agroforestry Cooperative (AAC)** will strengthen New Jersey's hazelnut industry by providing grower education, technical assistance, feasibility consultations, and food safety resources in partnership with Rutgers Cooperative Extension. AAC will deliver three programs: (1) co-organizing the annual New Jersey Hazelnut Growers Meeting; (2) a New Grower Technical Support Pilot offering public hazelnut seminars with farm tours, a site suitability worksheet, and on-farm feasibility consultations; and (3) food safety readiness and adapting Rutgers Extension food safety templates for hazelnut-specific conditions.	$38,102.50

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Increasing Distribution, Access, Consumption, and Consumer Purchasing of Specialty Crops by Hard-to-Reach Consumers in Food Desert Neighborhoods: A Media Campaign for the Veggie Mobile	Clifton	**City Green** will conduct a marketing campaign to increase awareness of mobile and farm stand markets offering New Jersey-grown specialty crops in food desert communities across northern New Jersey. Through enhanced media about the mobile market, the acceptance of federal nutrition benefits, and incentives available through the Good Food Bucks program, the project will increase awareness, accessibility, and consumption of specialty crops sourced from 11 New Jersey farmers and will support access to healthy food for more than 8,800 residents, annually.	$40,000.00
Building a Replicable Wash/Pack Model for Beginning and Small-Scale Specialty Crop Growers	Moorestown	**Mckaiden Farm** will demonstrate an affordable, food-safe, on-farm wash, pack, and distribution model to improve post-harvest handling and reduce crop losses for beginning and small-scale vegetable and herb growers. The project will improve produce handling, reduce post-harvest loss, and demonstrate scalable food safety solutions for small acreage farms selling through Community Supported Agriculture, farm stands, and farmers markets. Educational and outreach materials will be developed and shared at food safety training and demonstration workshops.	$35,000.00
Morris County Farm Trail & Agritourism - Always in Season	Morristown	**Morris County Tourism Bureau** will develop and promote a self-guided print and digital farm trail highlighting seasonal specialty crops, products, and agricultural experiences available on Morris County farms. The initiative aims to position Morris County-grown specialty crops and local farm produce as the central focus for both customers and visitors.	$40,000.00
Jersey Fresh & Found: Campaign to Connect New NJ Consumer Markets to Specialty Crops	Bordentown	**New Jersey Agricultural Society** (NJAS) will partner with the New Jersey Department of Agriculture to conduct an 18-month social media campaign that increases awareness and purchases of New Jersey specialty crops among consumers ages 18 to 35. This campaign is the distribution engine for NJAS's broader specialty crop storytelling ecosystem. This includes QR-linked educational materials produced under the companion Fresh & Local Campaign and blasting specialty crop content to a new generation of consumers who discover food, farmers, and local purchasing opportunities through Instagram.	$40,000.00
Promoting Nutrition and Consumption of New Jersey Blueberries to Local Consumers	Hammonton	**New Jersey Blueberry Growers Association** will conduct a radio and aerial advertising campaign throughout the tri-state area to promote the nutritional benefits and seasonal availability of fresh New Jersey blueberries. Together, these efforts will strengthen awareness of New Jersey blueberries, educate consumers about the benefits of purchasing locally grown fruit, increase demand during the limited fresh-market season, and help New Jersey blueberry growers remain competitive in an increasingly crowded domestic and international marketplace.	$40,000.00
Jersey Fresh: Highlighting Stories from the Garden State	Trenton	**New Jersey Department of Agriculture** will expand the promotion of New Jersey specialty crops and producers through print, digital, radio, streaming, events, trade shows, and other marketing channels while evaluating the impact of the Jersey Fresh brand. Project goals include creating a measurable increase in consumer awareness, purchasing and preference, new market opportunities, and increasing marketability, recognition, and demand for New Jersey grown specialty crops.	$335,912.30

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Education, Engagement & Events: Increasing Specialty Crop Sales in New Jersey	Bordentown	**New Jersey Nursery and Landscape Association** will partner with garden centers and businesses to conduct consumer education programs, digital outreach, and public events that promote New Jersey-grown horticultural specialty crops. The project aims to increase public awareness and consumer connection to these products, to maintain and expand market opportunities for specialty crops growers and retailers statewide.	$40,000.00
Marketing New Jersey Peaches in the Wake of Unprecedented 2026 Crop Losses	Glassboro	**New Jersey Peach Promotional Council** will conduct a multi-channel marketing campaign to restore consumer and wholesale demand for New Jersey peaches following a near-total crop loss caused by the post-bloom freeze in Spring 2026. The channels will include a strategic social marketing campaign, extensive billboard advertising, and a comprehensive print campaign to reestablish relationships with key retail accounts and drive sales at the retail level.	$40,000.00
South Jersey's Own Value-Added Products	Southhampton	**Pinelands Preservation Alliance** will work with South Jersey FEAST farms, local chefs, and the Rutgers Food Innovation Center to develop and market regionally branded, value-added products made from New Jersey specialty crops. These branded products will make New Jersey produce and farms more competitive by enabling small and medium-sized farms to earn much-needed revenue and by raising the profile of locally grown specialty crops among consumers.	$39,900.00
AI Systems for Early Detection and Targeted Management of Fairy Ring Disease in Cranberry Fields	Glassboro	**Rowan University** will collaborate with research partners and New Jersey cranberry growers to develop an artificial intelligence-based system for early detection and targeted management of fairy ring disease in cranberry bogs. Expected outcomes include improved early detection of fairy ring disease, georeferenced treatment maps for GPS-guided field treatment planning, and improved disease monitoring capabilities for cranberry growers.	$39,996.00
Evaluating Specialty Crop Production and Marketability in an Agrivoltaic System in New Jersey	Piscataway	**Rutgers Agrivoltaics Research Program** will evaluate dual-use agricultural systems that combine solar energy generation with specialty crop production and provide research-based guidance to growers about production parameters and market potential, with a focus on tomatoes. The work will examine harvesting windows, quality, and factors that influence marketability. Findings will be shared through extension, the program's website, and at industry meetings and conferences.	$39,894.00
Exploring Alternative Mulch Products for Tomato Production	Piscataway	**Rutgers Cooperative Extension** will evaluate biodegradable plastic mulch products for commercial tomato production by comparing their application, weed control, durability, and crop yield with conventional polyethylene mulch. The trial will examine ease of application of biodegradable mulches, weed control effectiveness, seasonal durability, and impact on crop yield. The mulch products will be used in on-farm demonstrations and results of the trials will be shared at field days, extension grower events, and through outreach materials.	$29,188.98
ABC: Apples, Bitter Rot, and Colletotrichum, Unravelling the Situation in New Jersey	New Brunswick	**Rutgers University** will identify the fungal species responsible for bitter rot in New Jersey apples and evaluate their distribution and fungicide sensitivity to improve disease-management recommendations. This research aims to provide a better understanding of this pathogen and to share findings that will help reduce crop loss for New Jersey apple growers, while managing fungicide resistance.	$39,761.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Application of Silicate Rock Powder Soil Amendment to Mitigate Micro and Nanoplastic Intake in Tomato and Cranberry Crops	New Brunswick	**Rutgers University** will collaborate with research partners and New Jersey growers to evaluate whether silicate rock powder soil amendments can reduce the uptake of micro- and nano-plastics (MNP) in tomatoes and cranberries. With New Jersey growers, the team will test amendment performance under real-world conditions and produce practical recommendations to enhance food safety by mitigating MNP contamination in specialty crops.	$39,079.00
Developing Plant-Based Preservation Technologies Inspired by Myrothamnus flabellifolius for Specialty Crop Applications	Ewing Township	**Ubuntu Permaculture Mission** will develop and evaluate a plant-based spray using Myrothamnus flabellifolius to slow senescence, reduce oxidative stress, and extend the post-harvest shelf life of specialty crops. This project prioritizes farmer-led trials, applied research, and extension collaboration to generate measurable economic and environmental outcomes for New Jersey producers. The intent is to provide a low-cost, easy-to-use spray system designed for real-world agricultural adoption.	$34,500.00
Vegetable Growers Association of New Jersey Education, Marketing, Research, and Outreach	Ringoes	**Vegetable Growers Association of New Jersey** will partner with Rutgers Cooperative Extension to provide grower education on specialty crop production, pest management, food safety, marketing, research, and new technologies while promoting seasonal New Jersey vegetables to consumers. This project will help the industry gain knowledge of important marketing and production methods and develop outreach materials for direct marketers to publicly distribute to increase awareness on how to prepare fresh vegetables and the health benefits from eating more vegetables.	$39,800.00

NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $732,277.47 ● Number of Subawards: 10

The New Mexico Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 5 research projects, 1 education and outreach project, 3 marketing projects, and 1 project that crosses more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including grapes, chile pepper, yellowhorn, and jujube throughout the State of New Mexico.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
All Good Snax: A Healthy Alternative for New Mexico	Albuquerque	**La Cosecha Community Supported Agriculture** aims to increase specialty crop consumption by expanding the availability of healthy, shelf-stable snack products made from locally grown organic specialty crops. We estimate that we will provide increased production/sourcing opportunities for specialty crop farms and reach 500 to 1,250 consumers in the next 3 years through multi-channel marketing and educational/outreach events, including partner collaborations, farmers markets, in-store presentations, and social media.	$52,472.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Expanding Specialty Crop Distribution and Market Access in New Mexico's Frontier Communities	Silver City	The **National Center for Frontier Communities** aims to increase specialty crop consumption by reducing distribution costs and expanding market access for specialty crops from New Mexico's frontier communities. The primary focus of this project is to expand a Frontier Food Hub-based distribution system that is already operational, in demand, and actively used by farms, ranches, and food businesses in some of the most remote counties in the state. Work will include coordinating producer supply, managing buyer relationships, scheduling and optimizing delivery routes, overseeing order and inventory systems, and facilitating communication among producers, drivers, and customers. Supporting this coordination capacity aims to ensure that existing specialty crop distribution continues without disruption while enabling targeted expansion into new markets.	$79,172.56
Enhancing Visibility of the New Mexico Chile Industry Through Culinary, Retail, and Digital Outreach	Las Cruces	**New Mexico Department of Agriculture** aims to increase awareness and demand for New Mexico green chile by assessing market needs, educating retailers, and engaging consumers through promotional and social media marketing efforts. A chef ambassador will work with retailers as well as social media professionals to implement green chile in recipes and menu developments. Consumers will be educated on its health benefits, recipe versatility, access, preparation and storage of green chile.	$81,549.00
Specialty Nut Crop Yellowhorn: Improving Quality in Production, Processing, Marketing, and Outreach	Las Cruces	**New Mexico State University** aims to expand specialty crop production by evaluating Yellowhorn as a sustainable, drought-tolerant crop and developing production practices, value-added products, and marketing strategies for New Mexico growers. While Yellowhorn currently has a limited established market in New Mexico, the project directly addresses this gap through consumer preference surveys, development of value-added products (nuts and teas), and targeted outreach, including farmers markets, workshops, and digital media to support early-stage market development and increase adoption.	$142,714.24
Synergistic Strategies for Native Plants Cover Cropping in Viticulture and Agrivoltaic Systems	Farmington	**New Mexico State University** aims to improve vineyard sustainability and native plant restoration by evaluating Navajo tea as a cover crop to enhance soil health, conserve water, and support pollinator habitat. Faculty in extension will share results through events, field-days, newspaper/blog columns, interviews, chapter house meetings, a Ready, Set, GROW! Webinar series, and the Master Gardener's program.	$91,993.05
Improving Resistance to Phytophthora Capsici Root Rot in New Mexican Chile Pepper Using Marker-Assisted Backcrossing	Las Cruces	**New Mexico State University** aims to improve chile pepper production by developing Phytophthora root rot-resistant breeding lines that increase disease resistance while maintaining the yield and quality of New Mexico chile varieties. The implementation of integrated phenotypic disease resistance screening and marker-assisted selection approaches is expected to result in the genetic improvement of current New Mexican type pepper germplasm. Results will be shared with growers and through extension.	$79,782.00
Reducing Input Costs Through Optimal Timing of Western Flower Thrips Management Tactics in New Mexico Chile	Las Cruces	**New Mexico State University** aims to improve integrated pest management for specialty crops by developing monitoring thresholds for western flower thrips that reduce pesticide use, production costs, and crop losses. Results to benefit specialty crop growers include reducing input costs by defining optimal intervention windows and thresholds that minimize unnecessary applications while maintaining effective control.	$40,325.13

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Antivirulence Approaches for Crop Protection (AACP)	Las Cruces	**New Mexico State University** aims to improve chile pepper disease management by developing anti-virulence compounds that suppress fungal and fungal-like pathogens and provide chili growers, who have expressed interest in this work, with new integrated pest management tools. Project deliverables include efficacies and application methods of specific anti-virulence compounds in the chile pepper, with broader outcomes of improved pest control, plant health, and food safety in other specialty crops of New Mexico.	$44,908.30
Jujube Cultivar Selection (II): Continued Seedling Selection and Validation of Promising Lines	Alcalde	**New Mexico State University** aims to expand jujube production by developing and evaluating high-performing cultivars adapted to New Mexico that improve fruit quality, productivity, and grower success. The goal is to release several New Mexico-selected jujube cultivars with excellent fruit quality and productivity of various maturation dates. This project will benefit jujube growers and home gardeners in New Mexico and nationwide.	$20,154.00
Trailblazing Wine Tourism: New Mexico's Data-Driven Digital Passport for Direct-To-Consumer Sales	Albuquerque	**New Mexico Wine & Grape Growers Association** aims to increase direct-to-consumer sales of New Mexico wine by developing a statewide digital passport that promotes wineries, increases visitation, and strengthens consumer engagement. This project addresses a critical need to strengthen the competitiveness of New Mexico's specialty crops, specifically winegrapes, by increasing wine sales by 2%, as well as growing consumer awareness and agritourism engagement.	$40,625.00

NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND MARKETS
Funds Awarded to State: $1,572,161.20 ● Number of Subawards: 9

The New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 4 research projects, 2 education and outreach projects, 2 marketing projects, and 1 project that crosses more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including grapes and hops throughout the State of New York.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Impact of High Temperature on Insecticide Performance and Residue Persistence for Spotted Lanternfly Control in Grapevines	Ithaca	**Cornell University** will evaluate how high summer temperatures affect the performance and persistence of five commonly used insecticides used to manage Spotted lanternfly infestations. Results will be used to develop temperature-informed recommendations for product selection and spray timing that improve spray precision and reduce unnecessary applications.	$195,369.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Optimizing Overtime Compensation to Strengthen the Competitiveness of New York's Specialty Crop Operations	Ithaca	**Cornell University** will identify wage, work hour, and benefit combinations that support both farm profitability and worker well-being as related to specialty crop operations. The project will engage farm employers and employees through surveys and choice experiments to collect information about labor preferences and workplace trade-offs. Researchers will analyze this data to develop practical guidance to help farms attract and retain employees while adapting to new overtime regulations.	$199,921.00
Improving White Mold Management in New York Specialty Crops through Field-Validated IPM Strategies	Ithaca	**Cornell University** will develop and evaluate integrated pest management (IPM) strategies to improve white mold control and reduce crop losses. Researchers will conduct replicated field trials over two years at research sites in Riverhead and Geneva to assess the effects of irrigation timing, mulching, and crop-specific fungicide programs on disease development and crop yield. Expected outcomes include improved grower knowledge and adoption of IPM practices, reduced fungicide use, decreased disease pressure, and improved profitability and sustainability of New York specialty crop production systems.	$151,061.00
Hopping from Farm to Glass	Ithaca	**Cornell University** is developing new hop varieties adapted to New York growing conditions and resistant to regional plant diseases. This project will establish a statewide on-farm trial network to evaluate promising experimental and heritage hop varieties in collaboration with the Hop Growers of New York. Data collected from growers and brewers will support the selection and commercialization of new hop varieties suited to New York production systems.	$162,258.00
An Examination of TiO2 as a Pesticide Replacement for Controlling Grape Downy Mildew While Supporting Soil Health	New York City	The **Light and Health Research Center** at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai will evaluate the effectiveness of titanium dioxide (TiO_2) photocatalytic nanoparticles (PNPs) for managing grape downy mildew while minimizing impacts on soil health. Working with growers, plant pathologists, soil biologists, pesticide manufacturers, and regulators, the project will assess both systemic and curative applications of TiO_2 PNPs over two growing seasons and compare results to conventional disease management practices.	$198,903.00
GAP Reimbursement Program	Albany	**New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets** will promote Good Agricultural Practices audits as the best way to prepare for new regulatory programs and standards to be implemented under the Food Safety Modernization Act and reimburse farmers for associated costs. Project funds will expand eligible costs to include items such as water testing, food safety related training, and technical assistance in preparing a food safety plan.	$85,000.00
Improving Food Safety and Increasing Access to New Markets through Group GAP	Albany	**New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets** will establish contractual relationships with groups of farmers seeking Group Good Agricultural Practices certification with the goal of increasing market access while improving on-farm food safety practices. Specifically, the project will continue ongoing work with the Produce Safety Alliance at Cornell to provide technical assistance to groups as they go through the process of obtaining Group Gap certification. Such assistance includes farmer training, mock audits, and other support, as necessary.	$100,000.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Marketing and Promotion of New York's Specialty Crops	Albany	**New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets** will promote New York's specialty crops at trade shows across the country, increasing sales of specialty crops, and broadening New York specialty crop producers' sales avenues nationally and via export. Marketing activities will focus on a coordinated presence at key national and regional trade shows.	$265,000.00
Concord Grape Industry Strategic Planning Initiative	Penn Yan	The **New York Wine & Grape Foundation** will lead a statewide initiative to strengthen the long-term competitiveness of New York's Concord grape industry through the development of a strategic planning roadmap. The project will identify and evaluate scalable opportunities to diversify end uses for Concord grapes, including juice, fresh-market sales, wine, ingredient reformulation, byproduct utilization, and emerging functional markets. Expected outcomes include increased stakeholder knowledge of market diversification opportunities, identification of commercially viable end-use pathways, improved grower returns, and enhanced long-term resilience and sustainability of New York's Concord grape sector.	$120,000.00

NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES

Funds Awarded to State: $1,508,325.38 ● Number of Subawards: 10

The North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 6 research projects, 1 marketing project, and 3 projects that cross more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops, including sweet potatoes, fir trees, tomatoes, blueberries, apples, canary melons, and centipede grass seed throughout the State of North Carolina.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Modernizing NC Fraser Fir Marketing	Boone	The **North Carolina Christmas Tree Association (NCCTA)** will increase the competitiveness of the fir industry by modernizing its digital outreach and penetrating new wholesale markets. The project will upgrade the NCCTA website to serve as the digital authority for the industry—ensuring educational material and tree location data is accessible to consumers and uses AI-assisted search technologies; targeting independent garden centers and wholesale buyers at national trade shows; and focusing consumer social media campaigns. With these efforts, the project aims to broaden market awareness and better secure the economic health of North Carolina's 850+ Christmas tree farms.	$100,000.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Effective Sour Rot Solutions for Sweet Potatoes	Raleigh	This **North Carolina State University** project will strengthen the competitiveness and long-term sustainability of North Carolina's sweet potato industry by developing science-based strategies to manage sour rot. Project leads will survey growers and packers to determine the prevalence and operational dynamics of sour rot, collect the causal agent, establish baseline sensitivity and resistance risk profiles to products, examine microbial communities on roots during all stages, and identify beneficial organisms to create strategies to suppress postharvest diseases. Results will be turned into practical management recommendations, web-based decision-support tools, and extension outreach.	$164,997.58
Accelerating Fraser Fir Breeding Cycles	Raleigh	The Whitehill Lab Christmas Tree Genetics Program at **North Carolina State University** will partner with the Upper Mountain Research Station in Ashe County to identify the underlying genetic elements that regulate reproductive bud set, bud flush, and reproductive cone formation in Fraser fir. Data from this study will provide a better understanding of the Fraser fir bud set/flush and reproductive bud development. Genes and pathways identified will support development of tools to accelerate and control cone production to support shortening of breeding cycles and strengthening of the Christmas tree industry.	$169,997.20
Developing Heat Tolerant Tomatoes for NC	Raleigh	This **North Carolina State University** project will advance the development of high-performing fresh-market tomato cultivars adapted to the state's production environments. This project will develop tomato hybrids that combine superior fruit quality with enhanced heat-stress tolerance, while sustaining productivity and marketability under elevated temperatures. Data generated will guide selection decisions and enable identification of hybrids with consistent performance under heat stress.	$190,000.00
Spotted Lanternfly Preparedness for NC Vineyards	Raleigh	This **North Carolina State University** project will enable preparedness for spotted lanternfly in North Carolina vineyards. The project will develop management recommendations for host plants near vineyards, establish a vineyard monitoring network for early detection, and deliver extension resources and training to help growers reduce potential impacts to the state's wine industry.	$139,873.98
Developing Blueberries for Mechanized Harvest	Raleigh	This **North Carolina State University** project will evaluate advanced blueberry selections for mechanical harvesting using established field trials to reduce labor dependency and improve grower profitability. Project deliverables include performance ratings and recommendations for growers, on-farm trials for cultivar release, and presentations at grower meetings. Expected outcomes are the identification of machine-harvest-adapted cultivars, reduced dependence on hand labor, improved harvest efficiency, and enhanced economic sustainability and competitiveness.	$166,760.83
Diamondback Moth Management on Brassica Crops	Raleigh	The Kennedy and Walgenbach Entomology Labs at **North Carolina State University** will develop a Diamondback Moth management program for brassica crops that combines pheromone-based mating disruption with optimized insecticide choice and application timing to prevent crop loss and mitigate the development of insecticide resistance and will disseminate results to stakeholders through grower meetings.	$149,950.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Lateral Branch Induction Strategies for Apple	Raleigh	This **North Carolina State University** project will improve orchard establishment practices, grow orchard productivity, and reduce labor inputs by developing lateral branch induction strategies for apples and disseminating results to stakeholders and scientific audiences.	$125,000.00
Postharvest Quality and Marketing Canary Melons	Raleigh	This **North Carolina State University** project will determine the best postharvest storage temperatures and times and identify attributes most important to consumers to expand markets for canary melons. In conjunction with commercial growers who sell through grocery stores, the project aims to encourage canary melon sales through education of grocery store consumers using displays and samples.	$100,000.00
Building North Carolina's Centipede Grass Seed Industry	Raleigh	**North Carolina State University**, in collaboration with NC Foundation Seed Producers, will expand the centipede grass seed industry in the state. This project will plant elite populations in research trials at certain sod farms to identify candidates for commercial release, promote "farmer-assisted participatory breeding," and create new income streams by building technical capacity for seed production and processing. It will also develop and implement an in-state seed certification program to improve market access for future cultivars, help ensure the long-term sustainability of the seed industry, support expansion of in-state seed production, and retain seed revenue within the state.	$149,503.60

NORTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $3,020,369.05 ● Number of Subawards: 24

The North Dakota Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 19 research projects, 1 education and outreach project, 1 marketing project, and 3 projects that cross more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including honey, beans, potatoes, tomatoes, peas, cucurbits, grapes, trees, throughout the State of North Dakota.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Expanding a DNA Screening Panel for Herbicide Resistance across Multiple Weed Species Impacting North Dakota Specialty Crops	Fargo	The **National Agricultural Genotyping Center** (NAGC) will build a comprehensive diagnostic panel to detect key target site mechanisms contributing to herbicide resistance in North Dakota weed populations to understand resistant genotype origins and spread. This project will optimize rapid DNA-based tests for known resistance mutations in broadleaf and grassy weed species and genotype an extensive collection of kochia populations across North Dakota. The results will be incorporated into NAGC's annual sampling program so specialty crop growers can receive real-time information on herbicide resistance in their fields.	$233,357.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Local Foods Specialty Crop Access, Awareness, and Education	Bismarck	The **North Dakota Department of Agriculture** will lead a project that will combine digital infrastructure improvements with hands-on agricultural education to strengthen connections between North Dakota consumers, specialty crop producers, and students, supporting both local food systems and experiential learning across the state. Expected outcomes include increased consumer engagement with local specialty crops, student engagement in specialty crop education, economic opportunities for producers, consumption of locally grown produce, and use of garden systems beyond the project period.	$110,189.25
Detection and Outreach for Invasive Horticultural Pests in North Dakota	Bismarck	**North Dakota Department of Agriculture** (NDDA), with the North Dakota State University Master Gardeners Program, NDSU Entomology, the North Dakota Forest Service (NDFS), and municipal foresters, will implement a statewide initiative to detect and document the presence or absence of high-consequence pests that threaten trees and shrubs but are not yet established in the state. NDDA will engage in targeted outreach throughout the year at garden shows, trade expos, and community events to educate stakeholders on the risks posed by invasive pests.	$83,565.50
Detection and Monitoring of Honey Bee Viruses	Bismarck	**North Dakota Department of Agriculture** will monitor viral loads in honeybee colonies by completing sampling on hives from beekeepers experiencing unexplained losses and random sampling—to try and detect viruses before losses occur. Results will be disseminated to all beekeepers at the annual North Dakota Beekeepers Association meetings and through periodical reports in the North Dakota Beekeepers Association quarterly newsletter.	$95,529.50
A Novel Approach to Combating Infectious Diseases on Tomatoes and Peas	Fargo	**North Dakota State University** has developed a combination treatment for tomatoes and peas that includes the use of the pre-biotic plant root exudate compound cytidine together with the pro-biotic plant growth promoting bacteria Azospirillum brasilense. This treatment has been effective at enhancing root architecture of one-week old peas and tomatoes and has decreased disease symptoms of tomatoes challenged by bacterial pathogens. This project will test the efficacy of the coatings on pea and tomato seeds. Results will be shared through publication.	$126,921.00
Breeding and Selection of Vegetable Crops for Northern Climate	Fargo	**North Dakota State University** will research genetic improvement of tomato (Solanum lycopersicum) and cucurbit crops for use in northern plains region through selective breeding. The outcome of this research will include the release of three to four new tomato cultivars with nodal fruit-bearing habit and small plant canopy for use by home growers who have limited growing spaces. Research will be presented at industry conferences.	$119,000.00
Improve Virus Detection in Fields for Managing Corky Ringspot Disease of Potato	Fargo	**North Dakota State University** will develop new real-time PCR and droplet digital PCR assays to detect and quantify Tobacco rattle virus (TRV) in potato field soils. The project will then compare assays for detecting the virus in soil and apply the assays to test soil samples collected from various fields. Researchers will validate the assays for disease risk assessment and determine the fields suitable for planting potatoes. This project will provide tools for detection of the virus in field soils and identifying fields infested with TRV to help predict if fields with TRV cause corky ringspot (CRS) disease in potatoes. Research will be presented at industry conferences and field days.	$128,418.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Developing Eco-friendly Integrated Management Strategies for Controlling Soybean Cyst Nematode in Dry Bean	Fargo	**North Dakota State University (NDSU)**, in partnership with the NDSU Dry Bean Breeding Program, will enhance the competitiveness of North Dakota dry bean (Phaseolus vulgaris) production by developing environment-friendly management strategies for soybean cyst nematode (SCN; Heterodera glycines). This project will deliver practical tools for growers and breeders to manage SCN with three complementary approaches. Results will be disseminated through publications, grower meetings, and field days to support adoption by dry bean growers.	$139,957.00
Reducing Risk and Market Barriers for Emerging Cold-Climate Grape Varieties in North Dakota	Fargo	**North Dakota State University**, in partnership with the State Department of Agriculture, will lead a project evaluating processing strategies for emerging cold-climate grape varieties grown in North Dakota. The aim is to improve wine quality, consistency, and economic viability while reducing risk for growers and wineries, to accelerate adoption of regionally adapted cultivars. Results will be shared through industry meetings, field days, and outreach, with practical processing guidelines and sensory benchmarks to support North Dakota's grape and wine sector.	$81,891.20
Identification and Promotion of the Health Benefits of Dry Edible Bean Derived Resistant Starch	Fargo	**North Dakota State University** will explore the resistant starch content in different dry bean market classes that are produced in North Dakota, including navy, pinto, black, kidney, and small red beans. The project will investigate these dry beans' health benefits when incorporated into foods. The results will be shared to audiences across North Dakota through the extension network of educators and their county clients using newsletters, fact sheets, webinars, and videos.	$93,022.00
Enhancing North Dakota Dry Bean Export Competitiveness through Development of Bruchid-Resistant Cultivars	Fargo	This **North Dakota State University** project, in partnership with the University of Puerto Rico, will strengthen U.S. dry bean export competitiveness by developing bean varieties that can withstand bruchid damage post-harvest. Researchers will evaluate bean lines under controlled storage conditions that reflect those commonly found in exporting countries. They will then select and advance the most effective and stable resistant lines for future variety development using modern genetic tools to speed up the breeding process. The aim is to reduce both time and cost required to develop improved varieties, lowering postharvest losses, and reducing shipment rejection.	$119,000.00
Field to Fork: Expanding Knowledge and Use of Specialty Crops Among Adults and Children	Fargo	**North Dakota State University**, with extension specialists, faculty, and staff from at least 30 counties and external partners, will enhance knowledge and safe food handling of specialty fruit and vegetable crops from field to fork. This project will enhance food safety, improve the capacity of all entities in the specialty crop distribution chain to comply with FSMA and GAP, and increase child and adult nutrition knowledge and consumption of specialty crops using webinars and new educational materials.	$85,358.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Combating Fungicide Insensitivity in Alternaria Leaf Spot Pathogens of Potatoes	Fargo	**North Dakota State University** will conduct research to improve management of Alternaria leaf spot diseases (early blight and brown spot), to strengthen knowledge of fungicide insensitivity of the four Alternaria species that cause two leaf spot diseases across North America. Study results, including improved recommendations for growers, will be disseminated to growers and industry stakeholders during the grower field days, winter meetings, scientific meetings, and through extension and scientific publications.	$184,939.00
Assessing Reservoir Risks of Rotational and Cover Crops for Potato Mop-Top Virus (PMTV)	Fargo	**North Dakota State University** potato pathologists will systematically identify, validate, and translate knowledge on potato mop-top virus (PMTV) reservoirs into practical, science-based guidance. The findings will be translated into grower-focused extension bulletins and peer-reviewed publications to support evidence-based PMTV management decisions that help growers minimize PMTV risk through informed cover and rotational crop decisions.	$196,402.00
Integrated Management of Aphanomyces and Fusarium Root Rot in Field Peas and Lentils	Fargo	The **North Dakota State University (NDSU)** Carrington Research Extension Center, in collaboration with the NDSU pulse breeding program, will evaluate the performance of field pea and lentil varieties and breeding lines relative to planting date in fields with severe Aphanomyces and Fusarium root rot pressure. Results will be disseminated at plot tours conducted at the on-farm studies, at summer field days and winter meetings, and through articles in agricultural publications and reports posted online.	$108,659.00
Integrated White Mold Management in Pinto Beans: Optimizing Dry Bean Yield, Quality, and Profitability	Fargo	The **North Dakota State University (NDSU)** Carrington Research Extension Center, in collaboration with the NDSU Robert Titus Irrigated Research Farm, will evaluate the integrated use of row spacing, dry bean architecture, nitrogen fertility, and different fungicide programs for white mold management in pinto beans. Results will be disseminated at plot tours and winter meetings, through articles in agricultural publications, and with reports posted online.	$85,574.00
Accelerating Breeding of New Slow-Darkening Light Red Kidney and Cranberry Beans Using Genomic Tools	Fargo	**North Dakota State University** will combine conventional breeding and marker-assisted selection to develop new slow-darkening (SD) light red kidney and cranberry bean germplasm to improve seed quality. This project will develop SD breeding lines, advance them to early-generation field testing for agronomic performance, and position them for future release as improved SD varieties. Results will be published and presented at an industry conference.	$74,230.00
Evaluation of In-Furrow Products for Management of Root Rots Impacting Dry Edible Bean	Fargo	**North Dakota State University** will determine the efficacy of in-furrow chemical applications to improve management of two important dry edible bean root rot diseases (Fusarium root rot and Rhizoctonia root rot). The project team will share results with stakeholders through grower and commodity meetings and publications.	$134,113.00
Identification of Tomato Varieties for Higher Yields, Better Fruit Quality, and Healthier Diets	Fargo	**North Dakota State University** Extension will manage a team of growers to identify tomato varieties in their fields that will lead to increased yields, decreased pesticide use, superior fruit quality, and greater availability of nutritious food to children and adults. Over 150 growers across the region are expected to participate in the evaluation of 20 tomato varieties. Special efforts will be made to include the participation of commercial growers by working with the North Dakota Farmers Market & Growers Association.	$6,185.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Evaluating Underutilized Native U.S. Trees for the North Dakota Nursery and Landscaping Industry	Fargo	This **North Dakota State University (NDSU)** project will increase genetic diversity in North Dakota landscapes by evaluating underutilized U.S. native woody tree species to benefit nurseries and landscapers. The project aims to identify new resilient, native tree species that will foster economic growth and ecological health with North Dakota urban and rural communities. Results of the project will be shared with specialty crop growers and other interested stakeholders at NDSU field days and facilitated through the North Dakota Nursery, Greenhouse, and Landscape Association.	$64,096.00
Evaluating Rootstock Influence on Oaks for North Dakota	Fargo	**North Dakota State University** will evaluate rootstock influence on soil pH adaptability and overall performance of grafted oak cultivars that are commercially available for use in North Dakota landscapes. Outcomes will benefit North Dakota nurseries, landscapers, and communities by supporting more reliable oak production, lowering replacement costs, and improving the economic and ecological value of specialty woody crops. Results of the project will be shared with specialty crop growers and other interested stakeholders at the annual association meeting of the North Dakota Nursery, Greenhouse, and Landscape Association.	$28,685.00
Germplasm Enhancement of Chickpea and Lentil using Mutation Induction Technology	Fargo	**North Dakota State University** will accelerate the development of improved chickpea and lentil cultivars and enhance the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of North Dakota's pulse industry by the induction of novel genetic variation. Through artificial mutagenesis, the project aims to create a broader and more diverse allelic pool to develop superior chickpea and lentil varieties adapted to North Dakota conditions. Research findings will be communicated directly to pulse growers and the final project results will be disseminated in peer-reviewed journals.	$118,663.00
International Market Access and Growth for ND Specialty Crop Producers and Processors	Fargo	The **North Dakota Trade Office (NDTO)** will create and expand opportunities for North Dakota specialty crop companies to showcase and establish their products in the global market. This will be accomplished by exhibiting at two prominent global tradeshows, each with its own unique opportunities for growth and global exposure, and a reverse trade mission for attendees with potential buyers from the MENA area (Morocco, UAE, Egypt, Saudi Arabia), hosted by the NDTO that will highlight the region's specialty crop producers and processors.	$235,543.51
Redefining Carbs: The Role of Potatoes in GLP-1-Friendly Eating	East Grand Forks	**Northland Potato Growers** will conduct an education and promotion project designed to increase consumer understanding and demand for North Dakota-grown potatoes by addressing evolving nutrition perceptions influenced by GLP-1 medications. Key deliverables include a GLP-1-friendly potato cookbook, professional toolkits for dietitians and educators, a consumer-focused digital education hub, and regionally targeted promotional materials. Expected outcomes include increased knowledge among consumers, educators, and nutrition professionals; improved confidence in potatoes as part of balanced meals; and strengthened regional demand for North Dakota-grown potatoes.	$124,998.75

COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF LANDS AND NATURAL RESOURCES
Amount of Funds Awarded: $290,301.36 ● Number of Subawards: 1

The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana (CNMI) Islands Department of Lands and Natural Resources will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by making a significant FY2026 subaward related to the value-added processing of CNMI specialty crops.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Developing Value-Added Processing Techniques to Extend Shelf-Life and Enhance Marketability of CNMI Specialty Crops	CNMI	This project will be a collaborative effort among the **CNMI-Department of Lands and Natural Resources, Division of Agriculture,** CNMI Northern Marianas College- Cooperative Research Education and Extension Services, and Garapan Public Market in Saipan. This project aims to increase the competitiveness of CNMI-grown specialty crops by developing and disseminating value-added processing techniques. By transforming perishable specialty crops (e.g., tropical fruits, roots crops) into shelf-stable products, local farmers can reduce post-harvest losses, maintain inventory during off-seasons, and expand market access beyond fresh-produce windows.	$268,260.46

OHIO DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $808,305.58 ● Number of Subawards: 6

The Ohio Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops through leveraging efforts to market and promote specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 3 research projects, 1 marketing project, and 2 projects that cross more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including apples, leafy greens, brassicas, herbs, maple syrup, honey, and nuts throughout the State of Ohio.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Increasing Capacity for Ohio Botanicals	Columbus	**Economic and Community Development Institute** will establish a dedicated, food safe herb processing and packaging hub at their Food Fort West facility to close Ohio's critical mid-chain infrastructure gap. The project will enable Ohio growers to transform specialty herbs grown in the state's rich soils and clean waters into identity-preserved, market ready products while creating local jobs and reducing reliance on imported botanicals by partnering with established Ohio botanical growers.	$120,000.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Market Led Specialty Crop Initiative	Yellow Springs	**Hall Hunger** will lead a coordinated initiative with Efinity Harvest LLC and Narrow Way Enterprises LLC to align farm production with verified buyer demand and establish efficient aggregation and distribution systems that expand market access, increase revenue, and increase competitiveness of Ohio specialty crops. Focus areas include farmer cohort development, coordinated buyer engagement, targeted technical assistance, and aggregation and distribution pathways connecting producers to institutional and community-based markets. Expected outcomes include increased market access for five farms, overall improved readiness, three to five new or expanded market channels, increased sales and revenue, reduced product loss, and expanded access to locally grown specialty crops.	$75,000.00
ODA Market Access Initiative	Reynoldsburg	The Ohio Proud program within the **Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA)** will lead the Market Access for Specialty Crops Initiative, a retail initiative to benefit small specialty crop producers. ODA will partner with maple syrup, honey, nut, and other fruit and produce specialty crop producers to implement a local food marketing initiative focused on product placement and consumer promotions at regional, small- to medium-sized specialty grocery stores, and restaurants with local, farm-to-table sourcing.	$120,000.00
Field to Function: Cover Crops in Northern Vegetable Rotations	Columbus	**Ohio State University** will support Ohio specialty crop producers by identifying effective summer cover crop strategies for use between spring and fall production of cool season vegetable crops, such as leafy greens and brassicas. Key deliverables include research-based recommendations, on-farm trial results, and extension materials that guide growers in adopting summer cover crops under northern growing conditions. Findings can be transferable to other states in the northern region and support increasing economic and ecological vitality in specialty crop production.	$135,000.00
Next Gen Apple Varieties for Ohio Farm Markets	Columbus	**Ohio State University** fruit tree scientists will work with Ohio apple growers to move into U-pick and on-farm commerce an array of 10 “as good or better than Honeycrisp” up-and-coming new apple varieties, which will help expand the fall season for sought after apples at local Ohio orchards. Collaborative work will include consumer on-farm tastings, grower shared experiences, and a study of crop load management on tree health and fruit quality of these emerging new kinds as well as making results widely available.	$107,424.00
Ensuring Food Safety of Hydroponic Leafy Greens	Columbus	**Ohio State University** researchers will improve food safety in hydroponic leafy green production systems through science-based mitigation strategies and workforce training. This integrated research and extension approach will generate actionable solutions to reduce microbial risks in hydroponic systems while building a skilled workforce and practical training programs to sustain safe and productive leafy green production.	$119,930.00

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD, AND FORESTRY
Funds Awarded to State: $752,330.88 ● Number of Subawards: 9

The Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 6 research projects, 2 marketing projects, and 1 project that crosses more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including pecans, strawberries, cucumbers, melons, and asparagus throughout the State of Oklahoma.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Early Detection and Management Planning for Phytoplasma Disease Threatening Oklahoma Pecan Orchards.	Stillwater	Researchers at **Oklahoma State University (OSU)** in the Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology will lead a statewide effort to detect and manage phytoplasma disease in Oklahoma pecan orchards. The project will involve surveying pecan orchards across multiple counties, documenting tree age and health status, and monitoring insect vectors likely responsible for disease spread. Outreach and education conducted through grower workshops and statewide distribution of OSU Extension materials and reports will help producers and agricultural stakeholders make informed decisions to protect the long-term viability of Oklahoma-grown pecans.	$74,722.00
High-Throughput Detection of Key Viral Diseases Affecting Oklahoma Cucurbits	Stillwater	**Oklahoma State University** will develop and validate a modular HiPlex multiplex RT-PCR diagnostic workflow for the detection of prevalent viral diseases affecting cucurbit crops in Oklahoma. This project will design a system that supports multiple diagnostic readouts, which will be used to improve viral pathogen surveillance and management in cucurbit crops, including watermelon, melon, squash, cucumber, and pumpkin, to help reduce yield loss and sustain quality.	$89,450.00
Advanced Diagnostic Testing of Oklahoma Specialty Crops	Stillwater	**Oklahoma State University** Plant Disease and Insect Diagnostic Laboratory will conduct basic and advanced diagnostic testing for all specialty crop samples from Oklahoma growers, free of charge. The laboratory staff will then process and share these results with growers in monthly tables distributed in a newsletter. This earlier identification of existing or new pests and plant pathogens will support producer efforts to better manage such threats to Oklahoma agriculture.	$89,352.00
Expanding Marketing Opportunities for Oklahoma Vegetable Producers with Season Long Production of Asparagus	Stillwater	Scientists at the **Oklahoma State University** (OSU) Horticulture and Landscape Architecture Department will investigate year-long production of high-quality asparagus in Oklahoma. By altering production practices and verifying performance of cultivars best suited for each production window, OSU seeks to recommend two additional summer production seasons for asparagus. Researchers will assess standard and new heat-tolerant variety yield and spear quality during the standard spring production window, a fall production window, and two additional summer production windows. Results will be extended to stakeholders at field day demonstrations, at grower workshops, through written conference proceedings/referred publications, and through "Vegi-short" video segments.	$87,224.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
FSMA Produce Safety & Traceability Rule Compliance Training for Specialty Crop Growers	Stillwater	**Oklahoma State University** will lead a two-year statewide initiative to strengthen food safety and traceability compliance among Oklahoma specialty crop growers. This project will provide training, education, and technical assistance aligned with the requirements of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), Produce Safety Rule, and Food Traceability Rule. Over the project period, the team will deliver sixteen total workshops—eight on each rule, training approximately 190 growers using standardized curricula recognized by regulatory agencies.	$37,678.00
Strengthening Strawberry Production in Oklahoma	Stillwater	**Oklahoma State University** will evaluate 12 fall-planted strawberry cultivars in both open-field and high tunnel production systems to provide producers with region-specific cultivar data, production insights, pest and disease occurrence, and optimal management timing, aiming to strengthen strawberry production in Oklahoma. By combining both open-field and high tunnel strawberry production systems, this project will strengthen research relevance, expand applicability of results, and provide a foundation for future research addressing key issues such as water management, disease management, postharvest strategies, and organic strawberry production.	$88,704.00
Evaluation of Potential New Cold-Hardy Cultivars for Oklahoma Pecan Production	Stillwater	**Oklahoma State University** will conduct controlled freeze-chamber experiments and field planting trials to evaluate cold hardiness and how carbohydrate content relates to freeze tolerance in seven pecan cultivars. The proposed research will provide valuable information to support future breeding and selection of cold-hardy pecan cultivars for growers in Oklahoma and other northern U.S. pecan producing regions.	$76,166.00
Advancing New Market Potential for Oklahoma Sod Producers Through High-Value Polystand Production Systems	Stillwater	**Oklahoma State University** will compare the improved year-round supply of bluemuda (bermudagrass with Kentucky bluegrass) production systems with the limited season conventional bermudagrass and tall fescue sod production under Oklahoma growing conditions. This project will evaluate a new high-value sod production system with the potential to improve year-round marketability for Oklahoma sod producers.	$61,770.00
Exploring Novel Nitrogen-Fixing and Nutrient Dense Vegetable Crops (Edamame and Long beans) for Healthier Soils and Communities in Oklahoma	Stillwater	**Oklahoma State University** researchers will lead an applied research project to support production of two nitrogen-fixing vegetable crops: edamame and long beans. This work will identify the best cultivars, improve water and nutrient efficiency, and determine phosphorus effects on yield, pod quality and nutritional value, and harvest timing of edamame and long beans. The goal is to provide practical, science-based recommendations that help Oklahoma producers improve yields, increase profitability, and build reliable specialty crop systems, providing Oklahoma growers who are looking to diversify and add high-value specialty crops a new opportunity, particularly in the mid-summer cropping period.	$87,079.00

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $2,763,505.69 ● Number of Subawards: 13

The Oregon Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 5 research projects, 2 education and outreach projects, 2 marketing projects, and 4 projects that cross more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including blackberries, Christmas trees, hazelnuts, honey, raspberries, and sweet cherries throughout the State of Oregon.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Companion Planting to Improve Water Efficiency and Resilience in Crops	Ontario	**A Good Management Company** will lead an applied research project to evaluate how companion planting with native grasses can improve water-use efficiency, soil health, and production viability for specialty crops grown under limited water conditions. The project will focus on lavender and chamomile, comparing monoculture and companion planting systems on both flat and sloped farmland. Findings will be shared with producers and stakeholders to support adoption of water-efficient, climate-resilient specialty crop practices.	$164,285.00
Pathways to Controlled Environment Production for Oregon Berry Growers	Portland	The **Northwest Berry Foundation** will lead this project to support the Oregon berry industry in evaluating and advancing the adoption of more controlled production systems, including protected cropping structures, substrate systems, and fully enclosed controlled environment agriculture. The project will assess regional costs, labor, water use, and weather variability and evaluate policy drivers to define tunnel, greenhouse, and indoor production systems that align with industry needs in Oregon. Results will be shared with growers to inform decision-making and support adoption of production systems that enhance specialty crop competitiveness.	$207,082.00
Developing Specialty Crop Industries Across Oregon	Salem	**Oregon Department of Agriculture** will provide resources to maintain and expand the Oregon Food and Agriculture Network. Three regions (Eastern Oregon, Mid-Willamette Valley, and Southern Oregon) are establishing this Network's technical assistance program. This project includes base funding to coordinators at existing Network locations, establishes and trains two additional Network locations, and develops technical assistance programming to focus on key priorities of specialty crop industries in each of the Network locations.	$299,343.00
IPPM Maintaining an Apple Maggot Pest Free Area for Milton-Freewater	Wilsonville	**Oregon Department of Agriculture** will focus on enabling early detection of the apple maggot and maintaining fruit fly pest-free area status for it in the Milton-Freewater fruit industry production area. The project will determine the current distribution and extent through trapping; continue to deploy, monitor, and maintain the trapping effort; and train and engage growers to support long-term, sustainable monitoring efforts through structured, year-round outreach and communication. Through these efforts the project will help protect the specialty crop industry, maintain its access to critical markets, and support the long-term economic stability of regional fruit producers.	$42,998.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Oregon Honey Bee Health Monitoring Program	Corvallis	The **Oregon Honey Bee Health Monitoring Program** will focus on strengthening pest monitoring efforts and reducing managed colony mortality for Oregon beekeepers, ultimately reducing colony losses and strengthening Oregon's pollinator-dependent specialty crops. Project objectives include 1) developing a rigorous training program with Oregon commercial beekeepers, 2) establishing an efficient sample processing system within Oregon State University's honey bee diagnostic lab, and (3) measuring pest population levels and management strategies through an open information sharing model.	$210,679.00
The Berry Breakthrough – A Product Accelerator Program for Oregon Caneberries	Portland	The **Oregon Raspberry & Blackberry Commission** will launch a mentorship program for ten entrepreneurs with an existing product prototype that uses Oregon berries. The primary focus is on accelerating and expanding the market for berry purees and individually quick-frozen berries, and products using high-volume berry formats will also be considered. Participants will undergo a 12-week product development and business residency, leveraging a partnership between Portland Community College (focusing on small business fundamentals) and the Food Innovation Center (expert technical assistance in food science). Refined products will be pitched to a panel of prominent industry leaders and retail buyers, supporting acceleration of their market entry, covering costs such as professional co-packing, branding, or distribution fees and supporting the next generation of food brands.	$107,500.00
Expanding Specialty Crop Access Through Culturally Specific Community Markets	Portland	The **Oregon Rohingya Myanmar Muslim Society** (ORMMS) will lead and implement this project to boost the competitiveness of Oregon grown specialty crops by expanding market access and promoting specialty crop consumption among local communities. The focus is to support beginning farmers with food safety training and technical mentorship from other farmers and retailers to meet high demand for Oregon produce, such as Roselle, water spinach, pumpkin, bitter melon, bottle gourd, Myanmar eggplant, and specialty chiles; culinary herbs such as cilantro, Thai basil, mint, and ginger; and fruits such as strawberries and watermelon.	$139,997.00
Improving Seed Label and Product Compliance in Inter-State Commerce	Tanget	The **Oregon Seed Association** will continue building a label compliance tool designed to improve market access by addressing regulatory burdens on the Oregon seed industry caused by non-harmonized state seed laws. Users will be able to perform a comprehensive label and product review against federal and all state requirements. The expansion to include a noxious weed seeds tool will allow users to identify which states restrict or prohibit shipment based on listed noxious weed seeds, protecting each state's environment and reducing uncertainty and costly violations.	$175,000.00
Breeding hazelnuts for durable resistance to eastern filbert blight	Corvallis	**Oregon State University**, in partnership with Rutgers University, will investigate quantitative resistance to eastern filbert blight and develop DNA markers to support breeding hazelnut cultivars with durable, long-term resistance. The project will evaluate disease response in these seedlings and selections, extract genomic DNA, and identify DNA markers associated with QR. These markers will enable breeders to efficiently select seedlings with strong QR, accelerating the development of new hazelnut cultivars with durable resistance.	$245,618.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Pesticide MRL Harmonization to Support Sweet Cherry Growers Export Standards	Corvallis	**Oregon State University** will focus on generating Oregon-specific pesticide residue and degradation data to support compliance with international maximum residue limits (MRLs) and improve export market access for sweet cherry growers and packers. The primary deliverable will be a validated pesticide residue dataset for commonly used registered pesticides that is suitable for comparison with international MRLs. Expected outcomes include reduced risk of shipment rejections, improved pesticide use decision making, enhanced regulatory confidence, and strengthened competitiveness of Oregon sweet cherries in high-value export markets.	$250,000.00
Developing Nitrogen Coefficients for Improved Nutrient Management in Eastern Oregon	Corvallis	**Oregon State University** will improve decision making for nitrogen fertilization for producers in eastern Oregon by developing nitrogen coefficients for regionally prominent annually grown specialty crops. This research will aid in regulatory compliance with Oregon Department of Agriculture rules in the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area and provide producers across the region with a tool to more effectively manage nitrogen for cost savings and reduced environmental impacts.	$249,996.00
Target Marketing and Campaign to Increase Oregon Christmas Tree Sales	Salem	The **Pacific Northwest Christmas Tree Association** (PNWCTA) will lead a research-driven marketing initiative to increase consumer demand for Oregon-grown Christmas trees in priority domestic markets. Key deliverables include updated market research, targeted consumer messaging, digital and print marketing materials, and performance metrics that track engagement and market response. The work of this initiative will equip the PNWCTA with actionable market intelligence and professionally developed marketing tools that reflect current consumer preferences and purchasing behaviors.	$250,000.00
Expanding Willamette Valley Specialty Crop Promotion and Access	Eugene	**Willamette Farm and Food Coalition** will expand access to and promotion of specialty crops throughout the Willamette Valley by strengthening regional marketing, expanding market access points, and increasing education. The project will incorporate data, feedback, and lessons learned to improve program implementation, and synthesize and share findings with regional and statewide stakeholders through presentations, written summaries, and industry-related events, including the Oregon Small Farms Conference.	$198,550.00

PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $1,182,709.99 ● Number of Subawards: 11

The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 3 research projects, 3 education and outreach projects, 2 marketing projects, and 3 projects that cross more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including mushrooms, potatoes, and apples throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Fly Count Mechanism Project: Empirical Measurement of Phorid Fly Populations in Pennsylvania Mushroom Production	Avondale	The **American Mushroom Institute** will improve phorid fly monitoring accuracy, strengthen pest management strategies, support regulatory clarity, and enable data-driven decision-making by developing, validating, and implementing a standardized, technology-enabled Fly Count Mechanism in collaboration with university researchers, regulators, and mushroom growers.	$115,000.00
Effect of Tuber Seed Size on Yield and Quality of Leading Potato Varieties in Pennsylvania	Harrisburg	**Pennsylvania Co-Operative Potato Growers, Inc.** will partner with Sterman Masser, Inc. and Pennsylvania State University to conduct field trials to assess the effect of tuber seed size on yield and quality of five leading potato varieties at three locations in Pennsylvania, determine optimum tuber seed size for maximum yield and high quality for each variety at each location, and provide optimum tuber seed size guidelines to Pennsylvania growers.	$115,000.00
Optimizing IPM Techniques to Control Mushroom Flies on Mushroom Farms	University Park	The **Pennsylvania State University** Mushroom Fly team will establish management protocols integrating two previously developed tools to control mushroom phorid (Megaselia halterata) fly populations on Pennsylvania mushroom farms. On farm experiments will be performed to investigate, optimize, and synergize predatory mite applications and Vestergaard Long Lasting Insecticide Net installations on mushroom farms. These activities will inform the mushroom industry of these techniques, and reduce product loss due to mushroom flies, improve crop yield and quality, and reduce pesticide use.	$111,537.00
Optimizing Cover Crops for Tree Fruit Production and Orchard Sustainability	University Park	**Pennsylvania State University** will enhance orchard sustainability by improving recommendations for cover crop plantings within the tree row. Research into the impact of cover crop varieties on apple tree and soil health will define thresholds for cover crop incorporation into intensive, high-density planting configurations. Results will be shared with stakeholders through grower meetings, online articles and resources, research publications, and a field day.	$89,793.00
Ecologically Informed Virus Management: Harnessing Natural Enemies to Improve Crop Protection	University Park	**Pennsylvania State University** will mitigate the spread of aphid-borne plant viruses in specialty vegetable crops by developing science-based virus monitoring and biological control strategies. This work will improve disease detection, enhance biological control recommendations, strengthen production system resilience, and increase the competitiveness of Pennsylvania's specialty crop industry.	$78,457.00
Turning Spent Mushroom Substrate into High-Value Carbon Products to Improve Grower Profitability	University Park	**Pennsylvania State University** will enhance the competitiveness and profitability of Pennsylvania mushroom growers by converting spent mushroom substrate (SMS) into high-value carbon products through materials processing and developing a feasibility assessment. Identifying new, scalable, and economically viable uses for SMS is a priority for enhancing the competitiveness and sustainability of Pennsylvania's mushroom industry.	$88,798.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Advancing Marketing Capacity in Pennsylvania's Maple Industry Through Producer-Consumer Insights and Targeted Outreach	University Park	**Pennsylvania State University** will strengthen the competitiveness of Pennsylvania's maple syrup industry by generating producer- and consumer-driven insights, identifying evidence-based marketing strategies, and delivering research-based outreach that helps producers increase consumer awareness and demand for Pennsylvania maple products.	$83,037.00
Root-Driven Soil Health: Linking Soil Structure, Root Biology, and Potato Yield in Pennsylvania	University Park	**Pennsylvania State University** will improve soil health understanding in potato production across Pennsylvania by linking physical, chemical, and biological soil indicators to root and tuber development and yield through experimental and on-farm research and extension outreach. The outcomes will support growers across regions, scales, and production systems to make data-driven decisions that enhance soil resilience and improve the economic performance of potato farms statewide.	$65,189.20
Evaluating Automated Orchard Management Tools for Organic Apple Production	Kutztown	The **Rodale Institute** will evaluate the economic viability and effective integration of autonomous mowing and string trimming, drone-based tree health monitoring, and digital pest trap monitoring tools in organic apple production. The project will compare technology guided organic apple management practices to standard organic management and share findings with stakeholders at apple grower meetings and research conferences.	$115,000.00
PA Preferred Culinary Connection with Focus on Promoting Pennsylvania Specialty Crops	Harrisburg	**Strategic Contracting, Inc.** will plan and coordinate the 2027 Pennsylvania Preferred Culinary Connection at the PA Farm Show in Harrisburg, Pa., a key marketing channel that increases sales and marketability of Pennsylvania-grown specialty crops. The event enables local farmers and food suppliers to showcase their specialty crops to local consumers, chefs, and restaurateurs.	$76,282.00
Pennsylvania Mushroom Food Safety, Substrate Innovation, and Producer Training Initiative	Danville	**Ten Mile Mushrooms** will improve food safety practices and substrate innovation for Pennsylvania mushroom producers by developing validated substrate protocols, implementing environmental monitoring, and delivering hands-on producer training and educational materials. These efforts will enhance the competitiveness of the state's specialty mushroom industry and create long term benefits for growers of all sizes.	$150,000.00

DEPARTAMENTO DE AGRICULTURA DE PUERTO RICO
Funds Awarded to State: $529,174.55 ● Number of Subawards: 6

The Departamento de Agricultura de Puerto Rico will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 2 research projects, 3 education and outreach projects, and 1 marketing project to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including fruits, vegetables, coffee, cacao, honey, and root crops throughout Puerto Rico.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
AGRO EDU & AGRO EDU BUSINESS: Strengthening Specialty Crops Through Agricultural Education and Business Development	San Juan	The **Puerto Rico Agricultural Innovation and Development Fund**, in collaboration with the Puerto Rico Department of Education, specialty crop farmers, schools, and community partners, will establish and enhance six school-based specialty crop demonstration gardens and greenhouse learning sites and deliver mobile agricultural education experiences to approximately 1,000 students in 12 schools. The project will also provide training and technical assistance to at least 50 specialty crop farmers on agricultural marketing, institutional procurement, and business development.	$90,875.05
Enhancing Specialty Crop Competitiveness through Food Safety and FSMA Training	San Juan	The **Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture**, through the Fondo de Innovacion para el Desarrollo Agricola (FIDA), will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crop producers by delivering an integrated training program focused on food safety, Food Safety Modernization Act compliance, and postharvest management in eight agricultural regions, Caguas, Naranjito, Ponce, Mayaguez, San German, Arecibo, Lares, and Utuado.	$162,927.50
Expanding International Market Opportunities for Puerto Rico Specialty Crops through Strategic Participation in Agricultural Trade Events	San Juan	The **Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture**, through the Fondo de Innovación para el Desarrollo Agrícola (FIDA), will enhance the competitiveness of Puerto Rico specialty crops by facilitating the participation of producers, agribusinesses, and agricultural professionals in international agricultural trade events. The project will provide specialty crop stakeholders with opportunities to establish commercial relationships, identify new export markets, access innovative technologies, and strengthen their knowledge of international market trends.	$82,820.00
Strengthening the Competitiveness of Puerto Rico's Specialty Crops Through Agricultural Fairs, Exhibitions, and Events	San Juan	The **Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture**, through the Fondo de Innovación para el Desarrollo Agrícola (FIDA), will enhance the competitiveness of Puerto Rico specialty crops by promoting locally produced fruits, vegetables, coffee, cacao, honey, root crops, and other specialty crops through participation in agricultural fairs, food festivals, trade shows, educational conferences, and industry events throughout the agricultural regions of Caguas, Naranjito, Ponce, Mayaguez, San German, Arecibo, Lares and Utuado.	$109,500.00
Study of Agricultural Market Niches with Potential for Conventional, Differentiated and Organic Products in Puerto Rico	San Juan	The **University of Puerto Rico** Mayagüez Campus – Agricultural Experiment Station will conduct a comprehensive study to identify and evaluate high-value market opportunities for specialty crops produced in Puerto Rico, including conventional, differentiated, value-added, and organic products. The project will assess specialty crops with the greatest potential for production expansion, import substitution, and access to profitable market niches.	$60,372.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Provide Organic Certified Seed to Farmer with USDA Organic Certified Fields	San Juan	The **University of Puerto Rico** Agricultural Experiment Station will strengthen the availability and accessibility of certified organic planting materials by developing a reliable, locally adapted seed and seedling production system. The project will focus on the propagation and distribution of certified organic seeds and planting materials for high-value specialty crops, including root crops such as tapioca, taro, and tanier, as well as fruit crops such as papaya, rambutan, pineapple, and cocoa. The project will further identify and establish a network of certified organic farmers across Puerto Rico, including developing a database that includes production capacity, crop types, and planting schedules to support coordinated seed distribution. This will in turn enable assessment and forecasting of demand for seeds and materials for better resource allocation and ultimately, support an increase in organic certified farmers.	$22,680.00

RHODE ISLAND DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $334,155.37 ● Number of Subawards: 4

The Rhode Island Division of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 1 research project, 1 education and outreach project, 1 marketing project, and 1 project that crosses more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including fruits, vegetables, nursery crops, okra, and floriculture throughout the State of Rhode Island.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
From Classroom to Cafeteria: Strengthening RI Grown Brand Awareness and Specialty Crop Markets	Providence	**Farm Fresh Rhode Island**'s Farm to School team will partner with educators to co-develop a flexible, publicly available model that implements the RI Grown campaign materials through farm to school activities. In five schools, educators and students will test classroom activities, student-led taste tests, and cafeteria promotions to increase exposure to and consumption of local specialty crops. The resulting model will offer scalable options based on schools' time, staffing, and budget constraints, while centering student leadership and RI Grown farmer connections.	$37,703.04
Rhode Island Controlled Environment Specialty Crop Food Safety Collaborative	Exeter	**Farming Turtles** will lead a project to increase food safety knowledge, compliance, and third-party audit readiness among Rhode Island specialty crop growers with a focus on controlled-environment agriculture. Over three years, the project will develop standardized, validated food safety tools and provide direct technical assistance, workshops, and training to at least 15 controlled environment specialty crop growers, with broader outreach to 40-60 producers statewide.	$44,108.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
RI Grown Specialty Crops Media Campaign	Providence	The **Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, Division of Agriculture**, will implement a statewide marketing initiative to increase consumer awareness and demand for specialty crops through the RI Grown brand. The project will strengthen market opportunities for local producers by improving brand recognition and making it easier for consumers to find and purchase local products. Key deliverables include a dedicated RI Grown consumer website separate from the State's primary website and the development and implementation of a comprehensive multimedia marketing campaign.	$156,010.88
Using Biochar to Benefit Specialty Crop Production in Rhode Island	Kingston	The **University of Rhode Island** will develop best management practices for utilizing biochar to build soil health and improve yields of Rhode Island-grown specialty crops, particularly vegetables. Recommendations will be based on the results of laboratory, greenhouse, and field experiments designed to identify biochar uses and application rates that give the best return on investment. Best management practices will be communicated to growers through cooperative extension publications.	$63,417.26

SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $819,616.51 ● Number of Subawards: 18

The South Carolina Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 3 research projects, 7 education and outreach projects, 7 marketing projects, and 1 project that crosses more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, muscadines, peaches, butter beans, and cut flowers throughout the State of South Carolina.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Business Planning for Military Veteran Specialty Crop Producers	Columbia	The **Agribusiness Center for Research and Entrepreneurship** will host in-person trainings for military veteran specialty crop producers, with a focus on new and beginning farmers. The program will consist of four two-day workshops led by experienced business planning experts, combining structured instruction with individualized, one-on-one support tailored to each participant's operation. Approximately 60 veteran producers will complete comprehensive business plans and gain valuable networking opportunities.	$37,728.00
Improving the Quality of South Carolina Specialty Cut Flowers through Optimization of Cold Chain Management and Delivering an Economic Assessment	Clemson	**Clemson University** will conduct research to provide scientifically based guidance on the optimal temperatures for storing and transporting cut flowers in South Carolina. The project will include an economic assessment and cost-benefit analysis to implement cooling facilities to help small and medium-scale cut flower growers increase competitiveness, expand markets, and improve profitability.	$36,225.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Providing the Southeastern Vegetable Crop Handbook to South Carolina Vegetable Growers	Clemson	**Clemson University** Cooperative Extension will provide the Southeast Vegetable Crop Handbook to South Carolina vegetable growers. This annually updated resource offers recommendations on planting practices, fertility, varieties, pesticide selection, and food safety, and is developed by the Southeast Vegetable Extension Working Group, which includes members from 14 land grant universities across the Southeast.	$6,500.00
Advancing Peach Cultivars with Sustainable Tolerance to Bacterial Spot and Brown Rot in South Carolina	Clemson	**Clemson University**, in collaboration with South Carolina peach growers and plant disease specialists, will advance and validate peach selections with durable tolerance to bacterial spot and brown rot through multi-site field trials, reduced-spray and organic-compatible evaluations, and genomic decision support tools. These efforts to strengthen the pipeline for disease-tolerant peach cultivars will help reduce crop losses, lower reliance on chemical inputs, and expand production options for South Carolina's peach growers.	$49,917.00
Defining How Row Cover Use Impacts Spider Mite Problems and Biological Control in South Carolina Strawberry Systems	Charleston	**Clemson University** will evaluate how the use of row covers in strawberry production affects two-spotted spider mite pressure and the efficacy of biological control. This project aims to reduce use of expensive miticides, improve spider mite management, and conserve natural enemies that help suppress secondary pests such as aphids and thrips. The project will disseminate findings to strawberry producers who will benefit stakeholders ranging from small UPICK to larger direct sale operations.	$34,960.00
Developing Evidence-based Postharvest Packaging Recommendations for Fresh Market Butter Beans	Florence	**Clemson University** will extend butter bean shelf life by evaluating packaging treatments to reduce postharvest discoloration and sharing practical, research-based recommendations to South Carolina producers through extension reports, grower meetings, and stakeholder pilot demonstrations. This work will provide the scientific foundation needed to expand butter bean distribution across the Southeast, benefiting the entire supply chain from growers to consumers.	$23,451.00
Optimizing Muscadine Grape Production and Cultivar Selection for Fresh-Market Systems in South Carolina	Clemson	**Clemson University** will develop science-based cropping strategies for current and future South Carolina muscadine growers by evaluating cultivar performance, vine spacing, and nutritional inputs to identify the most productive and profitable management systems for the region. Results will be delivered directly to growers through Clemson Extension field days, grower meetings, and South Carolina–specific muscadine production guides.	$50,000.00
Fine-tuning of Chemical Thinning Alternatives for SC Peach Orchards	Clemson	**Clemson University** will establish science-based guidelines for using chemical thinning options in South Carolina peach orchards. The project will generate data on how and when to use a newly registered plant growth regulator to support the economic and environmental sustainability of peach farms**.** Recommendations will be shared with farmers through local producer meetings, regional conferences, and online platforms such as the South Carolina Grower blog.	$36,704.00
Statewide Survey of Plant Pathogens and Plant-Parasitic Nematodes Affecting Small Fruit Crops in South Carolina	Clemson	**Clemson University** will conduct a coordinated, statewide survey of pathogens and nematodes affecting major small fruit crops grown in South Carolina. Results will be summarized and delivered to growers and other industry stakeholders to improve early detection, guide integrated pest management decisions, and enhance the long-term competitiveness of South Carolina small fruit production.	$33,850.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Expanding South Carolina Specialty Crop Markets Through Shared-Use Food Hub Infrastructure and Value-Added Processing	Greenville	**Feed & Seed Co.** will expand market access and value-added opportunities for South Carolina specialty crop growers by increasing the availability, consistency, and market readiness of South Carolina-grown specialty crops for school nutrition programs, while improving traceability systems to meet institutional procurement requirements. While anchored in Greenville County Schools, this project is designed as a scalable model to support farm to school programs statewide.	$62,144.49
Expanding Access to Domestic and International Markets Through Trade Show Pavilion Spaces	Columbia	The **South Carolina Department of Agriculture** will increase access to domestic and international markets by promoting South Carolina grown specialty crops at the Global Produce and Floral Show and providing affordable opportunities for South Carolina specialty crop farms and organizations to exhibit at the show. As the largest specialty crop focused trade show in the U.S., this event attracts nearly 20,000 buyers and industry representatives from over 60 different countries, providing ample opportunities for South Carolina growers to develop new market connections.	$35,000.00
Building New Market Access Points through the Local Food Connector Portal	Columbia	The **South Carolina Department of Agriculture** will expand and promote its Local Food Connector web portal to develop market access to schools, institutions, and other wholesale markets. This project will increase specialty crop farmer participation by promoting the portal through print media, online media, and in-person events contributing to stronger farm to school partnerships and increasing sales of South Carolina specialty crops.	$8,156.60
Cultivating Visibility: Certified SC Grown Specialty Crop Content Initiative	Columbia	The **South Carolina Department of Agriculture** will enhance the competitiveness of South Carolina specialty crops by expanding the Trace the Roots video and photo content library and promoting specialty crops through coordinated statewide marketing. The project will develop professional-, farmer-, and crop-focused video and photographic assets that strengthen consumer awareness, recognition, and demand for South Carolina-grown specialty crops through authentic visual storytelling.	$75,000.00
Produce Safety Outreach and Education Initiative	West Columbia	The **South Carolina Department of Agriculture Produce Safety Department** will continue to provide and expand critical educational support to specialty crop growers to strengthen on-farm food safety practices. This will be done through offering Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training courses at a reduced cost and expanding education related to the Food and Drug Administration's updated FSMA Produce Safety Rule.	$9,877.50
South Carolina Good Agricultural Practices Education, Technical Assistance and Cost Share Program	West Columbia	The **South Carolina Department of Agriculture Consumer Protection Division** will continue to improve and implement a Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) Education, Technical Assistance and Cost Share Program to assist specialty crop growers with expanding markets for greater growth and profitability. This project will provide GAP education and outreach, on-farm direct technical assistance, and GAP-audit-readiness trainings; conduct group trainings; provide marketing guidance; process cost share reimbursement requests; and complete data collection and reporting.	$95,447.80

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Microbial Contamination Water Analysis Cost Share Program	West Columbia	The **South Carolina Produce Safety Program,** administered by the South Carolina Department of Agriculture**,** will support on-farm water testing for specialty crop growers. This project will provide a cost-share reimbursement program for testing pre-harvest and post-harvest water sources for generic E. coli and coliform bacteria. These tests are essential for compliance with the Produce Safety Rule, Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) audits, and third-party food safety audits.	$10,000.00
Online Marketing to Drive Consumer Consumption of South Carolina Small Fruits	LaGrange	The **South Carolina Small Fruit Growers Association** will implement a statewide social media influencer marketing campaign to increase consumer awareness, purchasing, and consumption of South Carolina grown small fruits, including strawberries, blueberries, blackberries, raspberries, and muscadines. This project will educate consumers about when South Carolina small fruits are in season, where they can be purchased, and the health benefits of incorporating fresh, locally grown South Carolina small fruit into their diets.	$53,225.00
Specialty Crop Market Access Packaging Program	Columbia	The **South Carolina Specialty Crop Growers Association** will collaborate with the South Carolina Department of Agriculture to expand market access opportunities for small and mid-sized specialty crop growers across the state. By offsetting packaging costs, this project will help growers meet retail and wholesale buyer requirements, strengthen product visibility, enhance market readiness, and improve overall profitability.	$36,000.00

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $386,539.51 ● Number of Subawards: 6

The South Dakota Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 3 research projects, 1 education and outreach project, 1 marketing project, and 1 project that crosses more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including broccoli, honey, onion, peony, peppers, and sweetcorn throughout the State of South Dakota.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Expanding Access, Consumer Awareness, and Sustainable Infrastructure for Specialty Crops through the Black Hills Farmers Market	Rapid City	The **Black Hills Farmers Market** will expand consumer access and purchase of specialty crops in and around rural communities by increasing regional advertising and outreach promotion of South Dakota fruits, vegetables, herbs, flowers, and other specialty crop products available at the market. It will also improve consumer access to specialty crop vendors by expanding its market platform's digital vendor discovery tools.	$65,544.37

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
South Dakota Hive to Table: Increasing Access to Locally Produced Honey in School Lunch and Snack Programs	Roscoe	The **Edmunds Central School District** aims to address increasing consumer demand for locally produced honey by developing school recruitment, media, and education materials for distribution among schools. These materials will specifically demonstrate the nutritional benefits of consuming local honey and how locally sourced honey fits into school lunch and snack programs.	$30,000.00
The Integrated Peony Systems Study: Optimizing Disease Management, Sustainable Field Practices, and Post Harvest Quality for Northern Climates	Brandt	**Freedom Acres SD LLC** will lead a three-year research and demonstration project designed to support South Dakota peony producers by identifying practical, research-based production and post-harvest methods. These methods will help improve peony plant health through disease reduction and weed and moisture management, reducing labor demand, and increasing flower quality and vase life.	$24,503.38
Enhancing Specialty Crop Competitiveness by Improving Nitrogen Use Efficiency and Soil Health in Potato Production	Rapid City	**South Dakota Mines** will conduct field trials and evaluations on potato crops through the development of a soybean hull-derived soil bioenhancer to benefit potato growers. This soil enhancement will potentially reduce farmer dependency on synthetic nitrogen fertilizers, improve nitrogen use efficiency, and strengthen soil health while increasing potato yields and tuber quality.	$57,504.00
Development and Commercial Validation of Oilseed-Based Substrates for Specialty Mushroom Production and Valorization of Spent Substrate for Value-Ad	Brookings	**South Dakota State University**, in partnership with Black Hills Mushrooms LLC, will develop and validate scalable, cost-effective specialty mushroom substrate production systems using regionally available agricultural residues, including oilseed co-products. Research will include validated production protocols, economic feasibility models, spent mushroom substrate utilization strategies, and grower-focused extension materials. Outreach activities, including field demonstrations and workshops, will support adoption by specialty crop producers across South Dakota.	$91,325.00
Freezing Seasonality in South Dakota Specialty Crop Markets by Developing a Value Added IQF Network	Pierre	The **Value-Added Agriculture Development Center** and South Dakota Specialty Producers Association will enable six regional processing hubs to extend the current 120-day fresh specialty crop market season to year-round for ready-to-use frozen products. Processing hubs will use Individually Quick Frozen (IQF) technology to flash freeze specialty crops to expand availability and shelf life. Hubs will provide technical assistance demonstrating IQF processing procedures and develop and disseminate a "SD Specialty Crop IQF Toolkit" to industry stakeholders.	$81,480.90

Tennessee Department of Agriculture
Funds Awarded to State: $666,053.16 ● Number of Subawards: 12

The Tennessee Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 8 research projects, 2 education

and outreach projects, and 2 projects that cross more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including honey, apples, tomato, and grapes throughout the State of Tennessee.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Evaluating Smart Post-Harvest Systems to Improve Food Safety and Operational Efficiency in Specialty Crops	Brentwood	**Cul2vate** will improve post-harvest handling of specialty crops by implementing and evaluating a more efficient system for washing, sanitizing, weighing, and tracking produce. The project will compare current manual processes with equipment- and technology-assisted workflows designed to improve food safety practices, reduce labor time, increase weighing and reporting accuracy, and decrease produce loss during peak harvest periods. Findings will be shared with Tennessee specialty crop growers and industry partners through demonstrations and accessible project resources to support informed decisions about adopting postharvest technologies.	$34,240.00
Expanding Training Access for Tennessee Wine Grape and Winery Professionals	Sevierville	**Hillside Winery, Inc.** will expand its workforce education initiative by administering a transparent, first-come, first-served training fund for Tennessee wine grape growers, farm winery employees, winery production staff, vineyard workers, and qualified new entrants. The project will offset tuition, registration, examination, digital course access, and educational supply costs for established wine education qualifications. These activities will improve technical knowledge, support worker retention and advancement, and strengthen the statewide pool of trained professionals available to Tennessee vineyards and farm wineries.	$40,965.36
Development of AI-Ready and Lower-Cost Robotics Platform for Precision Post-Harvest Grading and Food Safety in Special Crops	Murfreesboro	**Middle Tennessee State University** will develop AI-ready, modular, and cost-effective robotics platforms to enable fruit and vegetable cleaning, sorting, and grading for small and medium farms in Tennessee. This will bring down costs and reduce health risks. The project will provide farmers with comprehensive training for the use of the platform.	$75,000.00
Creating Demand for Tennessee Specialty Crops through Children's Farmers Market and Consumer Education	Greeneville	**Rural Resources, Inc.** will increase awareness and support consumption of Tennessee-grown specialty crops by holding 15 children's farmers markets, nine classroom cooking sessions at elementary schools, and two on-site cooking camps for elementary students in Greene County. The project will provide over 1,800 students with opportunities to practice purchasing decisions with specialty crops, learn budgeting concepts, and gain hands-on experience preparing fruits and vegetables. The project will also evaluate how these efforts increase demand at local farmers markets. Results will be disseminated through teacher in-services and coordinated school health educators.	$42,947.00
Two-Spot Cotton Leafhopper: A Threat to the Tennessee Green Industry	McMinnville	**Tennessee State University** Nursery Research Center will assess the impact of the newly invasive two-spot cotton leafhopper on ornamental production by evaluating host feeding and egg deposition on key ornamental plants. The project will quantify feeding damage severity on widely grown woody and herbaceous ornamentals in the Solanaceae, Fabaceae and Asteraceae families. Findings will support the development of informed management guidance for growers and help protect the competitiveness of Tennessee's ornamental specialty crops.	$69,565.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Molecular and Metabolomic Insights into Redbud's Response to Vascular Streak Dieback and Evaluation of Nanomaterial-Based Management Strategies	McMinnville	**Tennessee State University** Nursery Research Center and the Tennessee Department of Agriculture will collaborate with regional nursery growers to investigate Vascular Streak Dieback, an emerging threat in redbud production systems. The project will examine how the pathogen interacts with its host at molecular and metabolic levels and evaluate targeted intervention with nanomaterials to disrupt disease progression. Findings will support development of science-based management strategies that protect the competitiveness of Tennessee's ornamental specialty crops.	$49,999.68
Overwintering Physiology, Phenology, And Biocontrol of Peach Scale in Tennessee	Memphis	The **University of Memphis** will study the peach scale pest by examining how females that survive the winter season behave in local conditions, identifying their natural enemies in West Tennessee, and testing fungal biocides for control. Results will be shared with West Tennessee fruit producers to help improve timing and effectiveness of chemical treatments and support more effective management approaches for Tennessee specialty crops.	$37,010.00
Evaluating the Incidence and Spread Potential of Emerging Virulent Tomato Mosaic Virus and Tomato Yellow Leaf curl Virus in Tennessee	Knoxville	The **University of Tennessee** will conduct a survey to evaluate the threat of emerging viruses in the state's tomato production regions by investigating the incidence and spread potential of tomato mosaic virus and tomato yellow leaf curl virus. Findings will be shared with stakeholders through Extension meetings, grower field days, and national publications to ensure the long-term sustainability of the state's tomato industry.	$73,726.00
Statewide Needs Assessment and SWOT Analysis to Guide Targeted Extension Programs for Sustainability of Tennessee's Nursery Industry	Knoxville	The **University of Tennessee** will conduct statewide needs assessment surveys and stakeholder interviews to perform a comprehensive SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis of Tennessee's nursery industry. This effort will identify production practices, regulatory constraints, markets trends, and emerging challenges that impact the industry's long-term competitiveness. Results will guide development of targeted stakeholder-informed programs, decision support tools, and extension education and training.	$74,999.90
Integrated Strategies to Reduce Bitter Rot and Glomerella Leaf Spot While Enhancing Apple Fruit Quality and Tree Health	Knoxville	The **University of Tennessee** will provide Tennessee apple growers with data-driven recommendations for mitigating the incidence and severity of Bitter Rot and Glomerella Leaf Spot to improve fruit quality. The project will evaluate canopy management and orchard sanitation practices with the potential to reduce fungicide use and strengthen disease control. Findings will support science-based management guidance that enhances the competitiveness of Tennessee's specialty crop apple producers.	$74,957.00
Protecting Tennessee Winegrapes from Downy Mildew Using Retractable Rain Shelters	Knoxville	The **University of Tennessee** will improve Tennessee winegrape production and support growers by providing research-based recommendations for managing downy mildew and supporting yield and fruit quality. The project will evaluate a retractable rain shelter system as an alternative canopy management approach and compare sheltered and unsheltered vineyard conditions for disease incidence, vine performance, and fruit quality. Findings will be shared through extension resources and workshops to support practical, science-based management strategies for Tennessee winegrape producers.	$74,966.20

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Cultivating the Next Generation of Memphis Specialty Crop Leaders: An Urban Agriculture Expansion & Education Initiative	Memphis	**Urban Roots of Tennessee** will enhance the competitiveness of Tennessee-grown specialty crops by supporting the establishment of a high-tech urban farm training hub that expands year-round production and provides hands-on workforce training for urban youth in North Memphis. The project will host teaching kitchen workshops and provide monthly community field days that teach specialty crop-growing techniques to 75+ urban youth interns. These activities will help build a stronger workforce and pipeline of specialty crop producers and market opportunities.	$17,677.00

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $2,019,228.98 ● Number of Subawards: 13

The Texas Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 5 research projects, 2 education and outreach projects, 2 marketing projects, and 4 projects that cross more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including grapes, watermelon, pecans, onions, and spinach throughout the State of Texas.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Increasing Healthy Food Access Through Collaborative Aggregation and Technical Assistance for Central Texas Small-Scale Diversified Vegetable Farmers	Cedar Creek	**Farmshare Austin** will partner with Austin Community College, Hope Full Farms, Urban Roots, and Farmhouse Delivery to enhance the competitiveness and availability of locally produced vegetable crops in Central Texas. The project will create an online food hub sales platform and provide targeted producer training in market demand driven crop planning, mixed produce production, and marketing skills. These activities will help small-scale and beginning vegetable farmers increase sales to food hubs and other wholesale buyers within the Austin/Travis County foodshed.	$195,918.00
Statewide Monitoring and Integrated Pest Management Education on Emerging Nursery and Landscape Pests Affecting Texas Specialty Crops	Overton	**Texas A&M** AgriLife Extension Service will mitigate the spread of the two-spot cotton leafhopper and short-spined thrips by establishing a coordinated statewide surveillance, education, and integrated pest management program. The project will collect and share monitoring data, create identification tools, and provide practical pest management recommendations to stakeholders through workshops, field trainings, newsletters, fact sheets, and educational videos. The project aims to prevent further spread of these pests, reduce potential economic impacts, and protect the long-term sustainability of Texas' ornamental and specialty crop industries.	$41,460.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Utilization of Brackish Water in Watermelon Production	College Station	**Texas A&M** AgriLife Research aims to improve watermelon production under rising salinity conditions in Texas by testing how saline water affects seedling health, fruit quality, and yield. The project will evaluate whether biochar and humic acid can reduce salt stress, improve soil conditions, and support healthy transplant production. The findings will help growers safely use saline water, reduce transplant losses, improve soil health, and potentially increase fruit value through enhanced citrulline content.	$179,260.00
Texas Commercial Crush Report and Vineyard Production Survey for Crop Years 2025 and 2026	College Station	**Texas A&M** AgriLife Extension Service will partner with local grape and wine commodity organizations to address current knowledge gaps in Texas vineyard and winery production value chains by producing an updated Commercial Crush Report and Vineyard Production Survey for Crop Years 2025 and 2026. By collecting and analyzing survey responses across two production years, the project will generate more complete and useful industry data while reducing burden on respondents. The updated reports will provide growers and wineries with timely information to support data-based decision making and long-term producer and industry growth.	$68,674.00
Natural Food Colorant from Texas Specialty Crop Byproducts	College Station	**Texas A&M** AgriLife Food Science Department will partner with the AgriLife Horticultural Department to develop natural food colorants from Texas specialty crop byproducts using green extraction methods. This project will test the resulting colorants for nutritional value, shelf life, and safe dosage, as well as test their use in food products. Results and technologies will be shared through publications and educational outreach.	$244,799.00
Pungent Protection: Enhancing Specialty Crop Stress Resilience Through Sulfur Fertilization in Cucumbers, Melons, and Tomatoes	Uvalde	**Texas A&M** AgriLife Research will assess the effectiveness of sulfur fertilization in improving crop stress resilience and develop actionable sulfur fertilization recommendations for growers. The project will test sulfur fertilization effects on stress responses in cucumber, tomato, and melon and assess variation in sulfur metabolism across tomato varieties. Findings will be compiled into guidelines and other public-facing materials.	$146,579.00
Applying Advanced Methods for Detecting Subtle Sanitation Issues in Fresh Spinach During Harvest and Postharvest Activities	College Station	**Texas A&M** AgriLife Research will partner with Texas leafy-green producers and packers to improve leafy greens safety and increase compliance with the Food and Drug Administration Produce Safety Rule. The project will identify and monitor environmental sources of pathogens within spinach harvest and packing settings and correlate sanitation practices with presence and levels of pathogens and indicator organisms. These findings will be used to develop science-based, precise sanitation strategies for improved safety and quality of the spinach grown in South Texas.	$249,904.00
Brassica Stunt Disease: Unravelling Its Cause(s) and Developing Appropriate Integrated Pest Management-Based Management Strategies	Weslaco	**Texas A&M** AgriLife Extension Service will partner with the vegetable industry to investigate the cause of the emerging brassica stunt disease and develop appropriate measures for its management based on integrated pest management principles. The project will survey affected brassica fields, identify the associated pathogen using high-throughput diagnostics, and develop improved detection tools. Findings will be translated into practical outreach materials and programs to help growers manage the disease and protect brassica production in Texas.	$241,226.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Nickel Concentrations in Pecans in Texas: A Limiting Factor for a Successful Export Market	Stephenville	**Texas A&M** AgriLife Research will assess the current nickel concentrations in Texas pecans and identify potential sources of nickel to pecan orchards. The project will also develop a practical evaluation protocol that enables pecan producers to estimate nickel concentrations in their nuts and make informed marketing decisions based on compliance with export market standards.	$103,033.00
Texas Citrus Kids: Early Education for Pest and Disease Prevention	Mission	**Texas Citrus Pest & Disease Management Corporation** will implement an early-education citrus outreach project to increase awareness of the Texas citrus industry, citrus pests and diseases, quarantine compliance, and proper backyard citrus tree care. The project will develop an age-appropriate educational video, create grade-specific classroom activities, distribute educational materials, conduct outreach to schools and educators, and implement interactive citrus education events for elementary students. These efforts will help reduce residential sources of pest and disease spread and support the long-term protection and competitiveness of Texas citrus production.	$75,440.00
Assessment of Rainfall-induced Contamination Risks and Curing Efficacy for Pathogen Control in Dry Bulb Onions	Mission	The **Texas International Produce Association** will partner with the Center for Produce Safety to assess potential contamination risks for dry bulb onions from heavy rainfall events during harvest. The project will determine *Escherichia coli* incidence and levels, evaluate heated-air curing as a microbial control step, and develop predictive, risk-based models. Results will be summarized in project reports and presented to industry stakeholders at the annual Center for Produce Safety Research Symposium.	$150,000.00
Creation of Physical, Virtual, and In-person Tools and Trainings to Benefit Texas Pecan Producers	Bryan	The **Texas Pecan Growers Association** will create new physical and virtual educational tools and host a learning-focused field day to support pecan growers across Texas. The project will create virtual reality field walks and expert sessions covering foundational tree care, invasive pests, and evolving orchard management practices. These tools will be shared widely through events, publications, and partner channels to support commercial growers, new growers, and landowners to improve the health and productivity of their pecan trees.	$106,960.05
Texas Grape & Wine Advancement Project	Austin	**Texas Wine & Grape Growers Association** will partner with Texas-based university viticulture and enology programs and regional wine groups to strengthen the competitiveness of Texas wine grapes by increasing consumer awareness, improving access to agritourism information, and expanding coordinated regional promotion across the Texas wine regions. The project will enhance a statewide interactive Texas Wine Discovery Hub online portal, develop shared marketing materials and targeted outreach efforts, and host regional workshops to build collaboration and support practical marketing and consumer engagement strategies.	$23,428.21

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $292,767.29 ● Number of Subawards: 3

The U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national

challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The Territory's subawards include 2 education and outreach projects and 1 project that crosses more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including watermelons and cantaloupe throughout USVI.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Evaluating the Production Potential for Diabetic Friendly Watermelon Hybrids in Farmers' Fields	Charlotte Amalie	The **University of the Virgin Islands** (UVI) will evaluate and establish production performance of diabetic-friendly watermelon hybrids by trialing the materials in farmers' fields located in three climatic zones of the Virgin Islands. Climate-stable hybrids will have the potential to increase safe consumption of watermelon among those at risk of type-2 diabetes.	$59,220.72
Diversification of USVI Farming Systems through Gladiolus - Cantaloupe Integration and Nanotechnology to Enhance Productivity and Drought - Pest Resilience	Kingshill	**University of the Virgin Islands** will investigate gladiolus–cantaloupe intercropping and nano-silica application to develop a specialty crop production system that enhances drought resilience, improves water-use efficiency, and diversifies specialty crop production in the USVI. Outcomes will deliver locally adapted production recommendations, strengthen specialty crop competitiveness, expand the USVI floriculture and cantaloupe industries, and enhance climate resilience and agricultural sustainability across the territory.	$55,121.00
Increasing High School Student's Awareness, Knowledge and Interest About Growing, Preparing and Accessing Locally Grown Crops	Kingshill	This **Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture** (VIDA) project aims to increase awareness, knowledge, production, preparation, and access to locally grown specialty crops through hands-on agricultural education, particularly in high schools. The project will provide practical training and outreach to stakeholders to strengthen knowledge of specialty crop production and increase the consumption and consumer purchasing of specialty crops and expand access to, production of, and distribution of specialty crops.	$163,473.91

UTAH DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD
Funds Awarded to State: $449,467.64 ● Number of Subawards: 5

The Utah Department of Agriculture and Food will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 1 research project, 2 education and outreach projects, and 2 projects that cross more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including evergreens, tomatoes, and watermelon throughout the State of Utah.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Building Up a Supply Chain of Regionally Adapted Urban Trees for Local Markets	Logan	**Utah State University** researchers will increase urban forest resilience to drought by propagating commercially unavailable tree species tested for toughness. This will simultaneously improve the quality of trees for consumers, increase sales for nurseries and garden centers, and conserve water resources. This greater availability of urban trees grown in-state would simultaneously improve the quality of trees for consumers, increase sales for nurseries and garden centers, and conserve water resources.	$98,404.91

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Locally Adapted Trees and Shrubs as a New Specialty Crop for Orchard Protection and Cut Foliage Production	Logan	**Utah State University** will develop recommendations for multipurpose cut foliage crops adapted to Utah's environment that have ornamental and structural value to create revenue-generating shelterbelts that increase cut foliage production and reduce wind, noise, herbicide drift, crop loss, soil erosion, and water use in Utah. The expected outcomes include at least 20 farms adopting cut foliage specialty crops and at least 200 farms increasing their knowledge about shelterbelts and conservation practices.	$96,193.44
Understanding the Dynamics of the Beet Curly Top Virus and its Insect Vector, the Beet Leafhopper Circulifer Tenellus, in Utah's Susceptible Crops	Logan	**Utah State University** will conduct research on beet curly top virus reservoirs in Utah and leafhopper overwintering locations. Specifically, the project will identify conditions necessary for movement as well as migration patterns and develop a forecasting model for the leafhopper migration—that could then be used by growers to adjust planting dates for tomatoes, beets, Swiss chard, and spinach to minimize chances of infection.	$88,214.21
Integrating Grafting Technology to Improve Stress Tolerance and Productivity in Watermelon in Utah	Logan	**Utah State University** will conduct field-based trials to investigate whether grafting can improve plant growth, yield, and fruit quality of watermelon under water deficit and salinity. This project will provide growers with a strategy to enhance resilience and productivity under Utah's challenging water-limited conditions. Field days and workshops will be organized to educate and train farmers by sharing major outcomes of this project to expand their knowledge on the use of grafting as a tool to increase watermelon production under water deficit and salt affected soils in Utah.	$30,972.51
Strengthening Utah's Specialty Crop Supply Chain and Market Access Through Vendor Education, Food Safety Training, and Applied Market Research	St George	**Utah Tech University** will work with the Utah Farmers Market Network to strengthen the competitiveness of Utah-grown specialty crops through coordinated supply chain education, food safety training, small business and marketing development, and applied market research. The project intends to offer measurable improvements in food safety compliance, producer marketing effectiveness, and supply chain coordination, with nearly 200 specialty crop producers gaining enhanced market access and revenue capacity.	$100,000.00

Vermont Agency of Agriculture: Funds Awarded to State: $384,347.87; Number of Subawards: 7

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 1 research project, 5 education and outreach projects, and 1 project that crosses more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including Asian greens, Swiss chard, floriculture, maple sugar, Christmas trees, and honey throughout the State of Vermont.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Strengthening Vermont's Floriculture Sector	St. Albans	**Franklin County Natural Resources Conservation District** will strengthen Vermont's floriculture sector by providing targeted education, technical assistance, and networking opportunities for flower farmers. The project will deliver a series of webinars, on-farm field days, regional food hub engagement, and the development of a centralized online hub and listserv. The aim will be to improve access to resources, support business planning, enhance market access, and promote environmentally sustainable practices for flower farmers across Vermont.	$24,148.00
Development of a Statewide Scouting and Monitoring Network for Vermont Vegetable and Berry Crop Producers	Burlington	The **University of Vermont** will improve pest management capacity for Vermont vegetable and berry producers statewide by establishing and coordinating a four-region pest scouting and monitoring network. This network will engage regional hub farms as host sites for local scouting and monitoring, alongside trained Master Gardener scouts, to collect field data and deliver timely, region-specific pest reports for digital distribution.	$34,240.00
Enhancing Maple Sap & Syrup Producer Decision Making through Research and Reporting	Montpelier	The **Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets** will expand upon the Maple Price Reporting pilot program to include focus on recruiting unprocessed sap sellers, a critical and growing piece of the maple industry, for regular price reporting. This project will also investigate the feasibility of tracking input costs of maple production, relevant to sap and syrup sales.	$44,434.60
Improving State Resource Navigation for Vermont's Specialty Crop Producers	Montpelier	The **Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAFM)** will begin development of a Farm Resources Navigation Tool that simplifies access to State regulations, requirements, and resources for specialty crop producers. This tool will also improve cross-agency understanding of regulatory requirements for farms. In this phase one project, VAAFM will identify the full scope of need and develop a comprehensive list of State resources that specialty crop producers need to start, grow, and maintain their operations.	$71,846.97
Regulatory & Technical Assistance Cross-Agency Education and Alignment to Support Enhanced Industry Viability	Montpelier	The **Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets (VAAFM)** will facilitate the development and implementation of specialty crop industry-specific cross-communication regarding food safety, plant health, and environmental sustainability regulatory requirements and best practices. The project will culminate in the development of resources to support cross-communication for both regulatory and granting entities within VAAFM. It will also coordinate regular industry-focused meetings of VAAFM and service providers to identify emergent issues, best practices, and continuing technical assistance gaps.	$48,719.40
Understanding Barriers & Opportunities to Expanded Regional Wholesale Market Access for Produce Farms	Montpelier	The **Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets** will utilize anonymized surveys and qualitative interviews with specialty crop producers and wholesale buyers to better understand market opportunities, operational barriers, and needed investments to support greater supply chain development for Vermont-grown specialty crops. Results will be synthesized into a report sharing both anonymized and qualitative (interview) data, as well as providing a list of further research, initiative, and policy recommendations to be pursued.	$75,039.20

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Practical Tools and Training for Winter Hydroponic Specialty Crop Production in Vermont	Burlington	**Village Hydroponics** will develop practical tools and training for energy-efficient winter hydroponic production of specialty crops in Vermont by conducting applied research on lighting and crop performance within an operating container farm and translating findings into farmer-focused guidance, training materials, and decision-making resources.	$35,000.00

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES
Funds Awarded to State: $722,070.36 ● Number of Subawards: 8

The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 5 research projects and 3 education and outreach projects that enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including apples, ornamentals, berries, grapes, and peaches throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Enhancing Economic Competitiveness for Producers through Food Safety Training and Certifications	Duffield	**Appalachian Sustainable Development** will expand food safety training and certification opportunities to meet changing Food Safety Modernization Act, Good Agricultural Practices, and Harmonize requirements for farmers to achieve compliance with regulations that protect specialty crop consumers.	$92,001.10
Increasing Production and Consumption of Specialty Crops in Virginia	Petersburg	**Virginia State University** Small Farms Outreach Program will partner with Virginia Department of Agriculture to increase the production and consumption of specialty crops in Virginia by strengthening food safety capacity and Good Agriculture Practices among specialty crop producers. This will include using specific farms as demonstration and training sites as readiness hubs by creating a coordinated system that integrates farmer training, standardized production practices, food safety readiness, and institutional market access. Participating farms will gain exposure on a range of topics, from developing food safety plans to developing cold storage, wash/pack infrastructure, and expanding regional handling capacity that aims to create a sustainable and scalable systems model.	$80,007.75
Cutting Costs from Below: Accelerating Root Development in Container-Grown Nursery Crops with Integrated Agrochemicals	Blacksburg	**Virginia Tech** researchers and extension specialists will determine if root-based phytohormones, biostimulants, and strategic timing and application of unique fertilizer formulations can be used to accelerate containerized root growth in nursery crops. This project also aims to reduce overlong production times and input costs, such as labor and resources.	$84,999.48

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Improving Food Safety Compliance through Specialty Crop Juice Production Training and Resource Development	Blacksburg	**Virginia Tech** will deliver Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point courses to Virginia specialty crop producers who make juices, to support food safety compliance across the Commonwealth. This will include development of a short course about retail exemption requirements and designing supplementary educational resources to support application to producers' specific operations.	$87,000.85
Validation of Prediction Models for Apple Bitter Rot, Identification of Fungi Causing Glomerella Leaf Spot and Greenhouse Evaluation of Fungicides for Control	Blacksburg	Researchers at **Virginia Tech** will identify the primary Colletotrichum species responsible for this disease and assess fungicide efficacy under controlled greenhouse conditions. The most accurate prediction model and effective fungicide strategies will be delivered to growers through extension programs. Outcomes from this work will enable Virginia fruit producers and stakeholders to better manage bitter rot and Glomerella leaf spot, reduce unnecessary fungicide applications, and minimize the risk of resistance development, ultimately improving production efficiency and sustainability.	$92,000.00
Develop a New Protocol for Digital Droplet PCR (ddPCR) for Rapid Detection and Temporal Survey of Colletotrichum Species in Apple, Grape, and Strawberry	Blacksburg	This **Virginia Tech** study will address the significant economic threat posed by Colletotrichum fungal diseases (apple bitter rot, grape rip rot, strawberry anthracnose and crown rot, and others) to high-value horticultural crops in Virginia and the Southern United States. The primary purpose of the project will be to validate digital droplet PCR (polymerase chain reaction) as a rapid, sensitive, and robust diagnostic tool that detects and quantifies the prevalence of these species from field samples. Work activities include sample collection, assay development, testing, actionable pathogen maps, extension meetings, surveys, outreach, and related collaboration with growers and industry partners. Outcomes include making recommendations to inform growers how to better use fungicides and pesticides to sustain these crops.	$45,471.72
Bountiful Blueberries for Virginia Markets: Assessing New Cultivars and their Human Health Potential	Blacksburg	Several **Virginia Tech** entities, including the Small Fruit Horticulture Program, will assess yield and fruit quality on new blueberry cultivars at their Hampton Roads location. They will also quantify the phytochemical monotropien in these cultivars to better gauge their human health potential. Findings will be disseminated to stakeholders through field days, presentations, and publications to help increase production and consumption of Virginia grown berries.	$92,000.03
How Low Is Too Low? Defining Safe Sanitizer Levels for Virginia Produce Wash Systems	Blacksburg	**Virginia Tech** will validate science-based sanitizer thresholds and water quality management practices for post-harvest produce wash systems used by Virginia's specialty crop industry. The project will evaluate specific sanitizers in flumes, dump tanks, hydrocoolers, and soak bins under commercial operating conditions, including increasing organic load, repeated water reuse, and varying produce contact times. Research activities will include laboratory validation studies, site visits to Virginia packinghouses, and field verification trials conducted in collaboration with growers, industry partners, and the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Produce Safety Team. Project deliverables will include validated sanitizer operating ranges, system-specific verification charts, extension decision tools, grower training materials, and statewide outreach events. Expected outcomes include improved postharvest food safety management, reduced uncertainty during audits and inspections, decreased unnecessary chemical and water use, and increased adoption of science-based wash water management practices across Virginia's specialty crop industry.	$92,000.00

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $5,166,261.86 ● Number of Subawards: 21

The Washington State Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 9 research projects, 7 education and outreach projects, 1 marketing project, and 4 projects that cross more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including apples, bartlett pears, grapes, carrots, garlic, and tea throughout the State of Washington.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Shade-Grown Cold-Crop, Product, and Market Development of PNW Forest-Farmed Specialty Tea	Bothell	**Agroforestry Northwest** will establish a sustainable local supply chain for high-value, shade-grown tea by integrating forest farming practices and management into Washington's specialty crop industry. The project will identify and propagate cold-hardy Camellia sinensis varieties, refining specialized processing techniques for high-value products like matcha, and developing local marketing protocols.	$212,218.53
Scaling for Success: Supporting Specialty Crop Producers through Market Development to Build Viable Farm Businesses	Mount Vernon	**Grow Food**, dba Viva Farms, will expand market access and improve post-harvest efficiency for Washington's specialty crop producers by providing market access and food safety training, providing shared aggregation and packaging equipment, and assisting small and mid-size producers in accessing and expanding targeted regional market opportunities. The project will help farmers extend their growing seasons, access premium wholesale and institutional markets, achieve food safety certification, and increase sales.	$249,452.53
Biochar for Soil Health and Market Innovation in Washington's Specialty Crop Industry	Rockport	**Kulshan Carbon Trust**, in partnership with Rodale Institute's Pacific Northwest Organic Center, Skagit Soils, and Bow Hill Blueberries, will conduct replicated field trials to evaluate compost-inoculated biochar applied at planting as a soil amendment for organic blueberry production. Field research will be coupled with grower-centered dissemination to accelerate adoption, including field days, demonstration events, peer-to-peer learning, digital training modules, grower alliances, extension networks, and industry presentations.	$212,736.32
Expanding Culinary Integration and Media Attention to Drive Sales of Washington Cider	Mt. Vernon	The **Northwest Cider Association (NWCA)** will launch a regional marketing initiative to elevate Washington-grown cider and Washington apples through expanded culinary partnerships, media outreach, and event activations. NWCA will conduct buyer workshops, host a fine dining restaurant event for chefs, buyers, and beverage directors, and conduct media events promoting Washington cider and award-winning products.	$249,388.00
Expanding Novelty-Colored Carrot Seed Production in Washington State	Port Townsend	**Organic Seed Alliance** will support novelty carrot seed production by conducting on-farm trials, hosting technical trainings and workshops, and developing resources specific to Washington state. Resources and trainings will feature tips on growing successful seed, integrating best practices, trial results, and regionally relevant recommendations.	$206,895.24

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Increase Demand for Pacific Northwest Canned Bartlett Pears Among K-12 Schools	Yakima	The **Pacific Northwest Canned Pear Service** will partner with organizations led by K-12 school-focused dietitians and chefs, to execute a marketing and communication campaign designed to provide K-12 schools with recipe ideas, nutrition attributes, and education information about Pacific Northwest grown canned pears. This campaign will be featured at various trade shows and events and through the Healthyschoolrecipes.com website.	$169,911.00
Safe Cooling, Safer Fruit: Optimizing Hydrocooling Water Management to Minimize Pathogen Risk in Stone Fruits	Pullman	**The Center for Produce Safety (CPS)** will partner with Washington State University to reduce contamination risks of Washington-grown stone fruits during postharvest processing. CPS will evaluate and validate critical operating parameters by adding chlorine to hydrocooling systems for stone fruits to minimize cross-contamination risk and enhance microbial safety of postharvest operations.	$249,450.00
Combining Entomopathogenic Fungi and Insecticides for the Management of Aphids and Aphid-Vectored Virus in Potato	Wapato	**USDA-Agricultural Research Service** researchers at the Temperate Tree Fruit and Vegetable Research Unit will collaborate with the research and extension faculty at Oregon State University to explore novel integrated pest management approaches targeting aphids and aphid-vectored viruses in potatoes. Researchers will specifically test a combination of efficiencies in alternative fungal biopesticides and insecticides and will identify promising targets for the development of gene suppression technology.	$249,450.00
Preservation Pathways: Connecting Consumers to WA Specialty Crops	Burlington	**Washington State University** Food Systems Program will lead a statewide initiative to increase consumer demand, consumption, and seasonal purchasing of Washington-grown specialty crops by promoting home food preservation strategies. Through partnerships with producers, tribes, and food recovery organizations, the project will create and distribute educational materials and food preservation tools, helping consumers store and enjoy local fruits and vegetables year-round.	$204,734.00
Managing Grapevine Chlorosis and Sour Rot through Plant Nutrition	Prosser	**Washington State University** will conduct research and develop tools to reduce the occurrence and severity of Concord iron-induced chlorosis (iron deficiency) and wine grape sour rot in vineyards. Researchers will test remediation soil approaches and efficacy of nutrient-based plant health products. Findings will be disseminated through field days.	$239,046.00
Are Wild Vaccinium and Close Relatives in the PNW a Reservoir for Disease?	Prosser	**Washington State University** researchers will determine whether blueberry-infecting viruses and phytoplasmas are present in both uncultivated ornamental and wild berry plants (vaccinium) in Washington State and how they compare to the viral presence in commercial production. This data will help growers and state regulatory agencies assess risks of pathogen spread and allow the development of appropriate control measures. It will also aid in grower and propagator education on the benefits of certification programs in the Pacific Northwest and their role in preventing pathogen introductions.	$72,217.46
Codling Moth Emergency Response	Wenatchee	**Washington State University**, in collaboration with the Okanogan County Pest Board, will develop resources to help manage and reduce the growing codling moth threat to orchards in the county. This project will provide cost share stipends for removal of infested orchard blocks threatening neighboring orchards, develop and share pest and fruit tree education materials, and offer boots on the ground netting demonstrations.	$240,175.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Evaluating Non-Chemical Weed Management Strategies for Washington State Tree Fruit Production	Pasco	**Washington State University** will collaborate with the Washington State Department of Agriculture to assess non-chemical weed management approaches in tree fruit production. Non-chemical methods to be evaluated include mowing, cultivation, mulching, electrical weed control, and combinations thereof. Field trials will be conducted to evaluate the efficacy of non-chemical weed management technologies and collect and analyze data on soil health and other agronomic factors related to the implementation of these practices. The project team will develop educational materials and hold field days, workshops, and webinars to share findings and recommendations.	$249,423.00
Enhancing Onion Microbiological Safety with Gaseous Ozone	Pasco	**Washington State University** will partner with the Washington State Department of Agriculture to evaluate gaseous ozone for enhancing postharvest onion microbiological safety. The overall goal is to enhance the microbiological safety and quality of Washington onions by validating gaseous ozone as a suitable and effective postharvest intervention for controlling foodborne pathogens and decay during extended storage, thereby improving both microbial safety and shelf-life performance.	$249,450.00
Too Hot to Handle: Effects of Thermal Stress on Floral Resources and Pollination in Blueberry	Mt. Vernon	**Washington State University**, with USDA-Agricultural Research Service and Utah State University as co-investigators, will conduct research to assess the effects of increasingly frequent and intense heat waves during spring floral bud development in blueberries through bloom and how this impacts pollinators. New knowledge and resources will be generated informing heat-mitigation strategies for blueberry growers. By identifying and characterizing the impacts of heat damage on both plants and honeybee pollinators, this project will support the development of management practices to safeguard pollination and ensure future yields.	$245,150.00
Mitigating Heat Stress Effects to Improve Uniformity of Wine Grape Ripening	Prosser	**Washington State University** will conduct field trials to assess the application and introduction of natural plant growth regulators used to re-synchronize grape berry ripening following heatwaves as an alternative to evaporative cooling by irrigation. Results will be disseminated to stakeholders through grower meetings and publications.	$249,427.00
Native American Specialty Crop Farm and Food Business Training and Certification Program	Rockport	**Washington State University Extension** will partner with Yakama Nation Farms, Long Hearing Farm, and other food business leaders to increase the number of successful Native-owned food and farm businesses in Washington by developing and offering a culturally informed food entrepreneurship training and certification program. This comprehensive and multi-session program will feature courses in sustainable specialty crop production, value-added business development, regulatory literacy, market access strategies, and advertising and brand development.	$246,393.00
Orchard Systems for WA 64 Apple	Wenatchee	**Washington State University** will conduct research and analysis to further define orchard recommendations for the commercial production of the new apple variety WA 64. As this variety moves towards the first commercial plantings, evaluation of the established orchards will enable more defined recommendations, especially as the trees age and start cropping. Demonstration and research orchards will be used to conduct extension events highlighting finds and recommendations for WA 64.	$248,557.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Smart Cherry Orchard Testbed for Testing and Demonstrating Emerging Technologies	Benton City	**Washington State University** research and extension team will establish a sweet cherry "Smart Orchard" testbed to evaluate and demonstrate emerging technologies in collaboration with stakeholders. The Smart Cherry Orchard Testbed will prioritize three key technologies: 1) irrigation management and automation, 2) abiotic (frost/heat) stress assessment and mitigation, and 3) crop load estimation technologies. Generated results will help cherry producers improve and accelerate adoption of new and existing viable technologies.	$211,077.00
Maximizing Farm Profitability through Integrated Orchard Practices and Mechanical Harvest in Washington Cider Apple Production	Mt. Vernon	**Washington State University** will conduct field trials to assess the tendency for cultivars to experience pre-harvest fruit drop and the effectiveness of plant growth regulators to mitigate this issue, leading to identification of cultivars most suitable for mechanical harvest and yield optimization. An economic analysis will be conducted on the costs and benefits of integrated orchard management practices that incorporate mechanization as a core component. Project outputs, including extension publications and presentations, will disseminate research-based findings to Washington cider apple producers.	$249,402.00
Drive Sales and Increase Distribution of WA Wines through Educational Inbound Immersion Program for U.S. Wine Buyers	Seattle	The **Washington State Wine Commission** will execute an important educational and marketing outreach effort, hosting approximately 66 influential U.S. restaurant and retail wine buying professionals. Restaurant and retail wine buyers will be recruited through a year-round nomination-based system to participate in one of two immersive educational trips designed to increase domestic sales of Washington produced wine. This immersive five-day program during harvest will establish strong relationships between wineries, specialty crop growers, and influential buyers that will lead to increased sales.	$248,390.00

WEST VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $360,145.60 ● Number of Subawards: 8

The West Virginia Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 1 research project, 5 education and outreach projects, and 2 projects that cross more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including pawpaw, goldenseal, black cohosh, ramps, tomatoes, peppers throughout West Virginia.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Determining Market Potential for Herb Production in West Virginia	Kanawha	**Patriot Guardens** will implement an integrated education and applied research initiative at its Urban Farm, focused on optimizing herb production across hydroponic, aeroponic, and soil-based growing systems. The project will provide hands-on and Zoom-based training to veterans, military family members, and community participants, delivering 23 practical courses that build skills in herb cultivation, system management, and harvest practices. By integrating workforce development, applied research, and market analysis, this project will expand local food production capacity, support agricultural entrepreneurship, and equip participants with the technical skills and economic insights needed for sustainable herb production.	$50,000.00
"Pie in the Sky"	Snowshoe	**Linwood Alive!** will enhance the competitiveness of West Virginia specialty crops by establishing a commercial kitchen to serve as a value-added processing hub for local growers. This project will provide commercial processing equipment and food safety training for local producers to transform raw specialty crops—such as apples, berries, pumpkins, potatoes, carrots, spinach—into sweet and savory pies, reducing post-harvest waste and expanding market reach. The project will develop and distribute a kitchen toolkit, including equipment lists, recipes, and food safety tips, to WV community kitchen organizations, as well as technical training and workshops held for toolkit users.	$35,535.00
Prevention of Fungal Disease and Emerging Mycotoxin Contamination in Greenhouse-Grown Tomatoes, Peppers and Strawberries	Charleston	**West Virginia Department of Agriculture** will conduct research on the prevention and reduction of fungal disease and emerging mycotoxin pressures and contamination in specialty crops, specifically tomatoes, peppers, and strawberries. Controlled studies to assess the environmental conditions that promote or suppress fungal growth and mycotoxin production will be conducted within renovated greenhouses laboratories. Results will include validated screening methods, science-based disease prevention strategies, and best-practice guidance for specialty crop producers, directly enhancing the competitiveness, safety, and marketability of specialty crops to benefit all of West Virginia.	$74,971.88
Improving Seasonal Coordination and Market Access for WV Specialty Crops though Statewide Market Intelligence System	Charleston	The **West Virginia Farmers Market Association Inc.** (WVFMA) will establish and pilot a digital market access system for up to eight specialty crop market access points statewide. Through an open, published selection process, requiring at least one verified specialty crop grower per site, WVFMA will train growers and data liaisons to collect grower data, crop availability and production information, and inventory information in 2027 and 2028. Each site will translate the seasonal findings into public education and site summaries for utilization through outreach to senior centers and organizations that serve farmers market voucher recipients. Aggregated findings, practical templates, seasonal-availability materials, and a replication guide will help growers and direct-market businesses plan production, market timing, and customer retention. This information will better inform consumers about the availability and seasonality of local specialty crops.	$31,762.76

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Better by the Bushel: Building Stronger Farms through Organic and Sustainable Practices, Technical Assistance and Bulk Buying	Charleston	The **West Virginia Food and Farm Coalition** will lead a statewide initiative to expand coordinated technical assistance and bulk purchasing support for small and mid-scale specialty crop farms, particularly those who are engaged in or want to engage in sustainable, regenerative, organic, or natural production practices. One-on-one technical assistance opportunities and training workshops will be hosted throughout the state, focusing on topics such as regenerative farming, sustainable practices, soil health, product aggregation, and market readiness and access.	$50,166.67
Pawpaw (Asimina triloba) Potential: Advancing Value-Added Product Innovation and Consumer Education	Institute	**West Virginia State University** will develop new value-added products utilizing the locally grown and nutritious pawpaw (Asimina triloba) fruit. Value-added processing, such as jams, jellies, puree, and ice cream, and freeze-drying of West Virginia's pawpaw fruit extends the shelf-life and reduces postharvest losses, while also increasing access to niche markets where consumers value high-quality and nutritious, locally sourced foods. Results will be disseminated through community events, tastings, and demonstrations featuring WV value-added products.	$15,053.88
Growing Skills from the Ground Up: A Nicholas County 4-H Program in Agriculture Production, Food Preservation and Business Development	Summersville	**West Virginia University** will design and launch a specialty crop education program for 4-H youth, including through establishing a community Youth Garden. The program will train participants in specialty crop production, food safety and preservation practices, brand and label development, and small-scale market readiness. Supported by 4-H volunteers, youth will build technical and entrepreneurial skills while learning the full process of operating a food-based enterprise, expanding access to locally grown specialty crops, improving sustainable production practices, and successfully marketing and selling fresh and value-added products in local markets.	$14,954.43
Bridging Remote and Field Learning for WV Forest Farmer Education and Agritourism	Hillsboro	**Yew Mountain Center** (YMC) will develop and expand agritourism and forest farmer education in West Virginia by developing replicable place-based and online training resources focused on forest farmed specialty crop production. The project will increase public awareness, producer skills, and economic opportunities for forest farmers and businesses, specifically medicinal plants, culinary and medicinal mushrooms, tree saps, and raw honey.	$49,250.00

WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, TRADE AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

Funds Awarded to State: $1,500,033.33 ● Number of Subawards: 14

The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 6 research projects, 4 education and outreach projects, 1 marketing project, and 3 projects that cross more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including (beets, carrots, hazelnut, potato, rhubarb) throughout the State of Wisconsin.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Increasing Food Safety and Distribution Capacity to Grow Specialty Crop Wholesale Markets	Madison	**Community Action Coalition for South Central Wisconsin** will host workshops to assist specialty crop producers in building their capacity to sell to aggregators, increase production opportunities, and improve compliance with good agricultural practices and good handling practices. Foodshed, a local nonprofit produce aggregation and distribution hub, will host workshops and provide technical assistance to producers on ensuring food safety through rigorous wholesale standards for washing, packing and labeling specialty crops at participating farms that incorporate demonstrations using the produce and equipment available on the farm. Through these workshops and technical assistance opportunities, the likelihood of rejected produce due to not meeting standards and the overall amount of produce that is wasted will be greatly decreased.	$99,449.00
Cultivating Sustainable, Efficient, and Scalable Diversified Vegetable Operations in Wisconsin	Madison	**FairShare CSA Coalition** will train diversified vegetable growers in Wisconsin on sustainable farming techniques to boost production potential and scale up and access new market opportunities. The project will provide education on sustainable weed control, agroforestry and perennial crop incorporation, and equipment operation that will improve farm performance. Activities include on-farm workshops and training.	$90,654.00
Expanding Wisconsin CSA Markets Through Consumer Research and Nutrition Education	Madison	**FairShare CSA Coalition** will conduct consumer research and launch a Wisconsin Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) marketing and education campaign and enhanced digital platform. The project will survey at least 150 Wisconsin consumers to understand what motivates CSA purchases, with particular attention to health motivations, economic barriers, and consumer preferences. Survey findings will shared with farmers through practical education and marketing materials through annual meetings, quarterly webinars, and written communications, as well as through the newly enhanced “Find Your Farm” digital CSA search tool.	$89,037.00
Produce of the Month	Oshkosh	**Oshkosh Area Community Pantry** will enhance the competitiveness of Wisconsin-grown specialty crops by boosting consumer knowledge and consumption through a "Produce of the Month" promotion initiative. Each featured specialty crop will be promoted with in-store signage, sampling, and information and recipe sheets to increase knowledge and consumption among low-income families. The project will increase consumption, knowledge, and healthy eating habits, and expand market opportunities for Wisconsin specialty crop producers.	$21,174.10
Establishing a Clonal Propagation System for Hybrid Hazelnuts to Build Wisconsin's Nut Industry	Madison	The **University of Wisconsin** will refine and deploy a clonal micropropagation system for hybrid hazelnut to overcome the primary bottleneck limiting expansion of a hazelnut industry in Wisconsin: the lack of high-quality, scalable planting material. The objectives of this project are to optimize a reliable micropropagation protocol for elite hybrid hazelnut cultivars, use this system to deliver foundation plant material to commercial partners, and disseminate results to stakeholders through outreach conducted at field days, grower meetings, and extension publications.	$99,999.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Supporting Successful Integrated Pest Management on Wisconsin's Diversified Vegetable Farms	Madison	The **University of Wisconsin** will develop integrated pest management (IPM) concept and strategy resources that are accessible, easy-to-follow, and actionable for vegetable growers across Wisconsin. Written and visual resources created will use plain language, include recommendations and templates structured to practice timing in the growing season, and allow for easy `practice-stacking' and integration into existing farm operations. This project will conduct three in person field days annually showcasing the three on-farm demonstration plots and IPM best practices and provide virtual tutorials through online extension and across grower groups.	$99,925.00
Perennial Resilience: Rhubarb's Role in Modern Wisconsin Commercial Agriculture	Madison	The **University of Wisconsin** Emerging Crops team will explore the viability of rhubarb as a commercial crop in Wisconsin through market research, variety trials, nutritional analyses, and enterprise budgets. The team will provide growers and processors science-based information and recommendations to better inform feasibility, planning, and production systems. Project results will be disseminated to Wisconsin growers and industry stakeholders through presentations at conferences, workshops, podcasts, and articles.	$80,359.00
Predicting Japanese Beetle Adult Emergence and Population Dynamics in Vineyards	Madison	The **University of Wisconsin** will assess the correlation of air and soil temperature and moisture in relation to the infestation of Japanese beetle (JB) on commercial vineyards. The project will monitor first detection and seasonal population dynamics of JB through pheromone traps and provide information on the optimal timing of management strategies, such as chemical control applications and biocontrol strategies. Results will be presented to growers and the research community. first detection and seasonal abundance	$99,976.00
A Season-long System to Reduce Groundwater Contamination Risks in Potatoes Grown on Sandy Soils	Madison	The **University of Wisconsin** will develop a holistic, systematic approach to mitigate nitrogen losses and groundwater contamination from potatoes grown on highly leachable sandy soils. This will be accomplished by evaluating combinations of in-season intercropping, potato vine removal at harvest, winter cover cropping, and precision fertilization with modern slow-release fertilizers in a replicated and repeated study where both nitrate leaching and grower economic returns are quantified. Techniques and results will be shared with growers via field tours and grower meetings to drive industry adoption.	$99,613.00
Developing Economic Thresholds for Fumigation Decisions Based on Soil Microbiome Testing	Madison	The **University of Wisconsin** Departments of Plant Pathology and Agricultural and Applied Economics, in conjunction with Wisconsin potato growers, will assess soil fumigation efficacy and the existing machine learning models for accuracy and error rates. Soil samples will be tested, optimized, and validated using machine learning models to predict the fumigation effects, used to manage a variety of soil-borne diseases and nematodes, and the increase in yield due to fumigation. Findings will be combined with economic analysis to determine predicted return-on-investment for fumigation decisions based on soil properties. An economic model/tool will be developed to help farmers eliminate unneeded fumigation of crop fields, which will increase farm income and reduce negative environmental impacts. Project results will be disseminated to stakeholders through grower meetings and field days.	$98,664.00

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Exploring Integrated Management Practices to Reduce Common Scab in Vegetable Root Crops for Wisconsin	Madison	**University of Wisconsin-Madison** Department of Plant Pathology will mitigate the negative impacts of common scab, a soilborne disease, in potato, beet, and carrot crops through the impacts of cultural practices and novel biorational (rapidly biodegradable and exhibit low toxicity) inputs. The project will monitor and evaluate the role of soil moisture in the potato tubersphere during the tuberization phase in mitigating common scab in multiple Wisconsin locations. Results will be disseminated to stakeholders through grower meetings, field days, newsletters, and production guide materials.	$73,746.00
The Virtual Food Hub: A Hybrid Logistics Pilot for Wisconsin Specialty Crops	Green Bay	**Wello**, in partnership with SLO Farmers Cooperative, will utilize its mobile market vehicle to pilot a "Virtual Food Hub" that aggregates inventory for simultaneous distribution to multiple community resource centers, Farmers Market Nutrition Program retail access points, and institutional wholesale buyers. This project will test the feasibility of a virtual hub model as a market channel for groups of small specialty crop producers, as well as connect small farmers to community organizations to increase knowledge and consumption of specialty crops.	$87,609.00
"Expedition Agriculture" Classroom Education of WI Specialty Crops	Madison	The **Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection** will provide an educational program "Expedition Agriculture" for school children utilizing its state's agricultural spokesperson The state will further amplify its message on the unique specialty crops in Wisconsin and their importance, by identifying several events to live stream from specialty crop farms and broadcast to schools. Examples of events may include the state's first Christmas tree cutting, a maple syrup tapping, or a harvest in a cranberry bog.	$99,916.00
Advancing Seed Potato Diagnostics Through Optimization of Novel Direct Tuber Testing	Madison	The **Wisconsin Seed Potato Certification** Program, in collaboration with multiple partners, will address whether a potato tuber warming period is necessary, the optimal duration of that period, and Potato Virus Y detection accuracy. Results will be shared with the potato production community through events such as annual field days, and potato association conferences and expos.	$78,806.00

WYOMING DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Funds Awarded to State: $342,995.86 ● Number of Subawards: 5

The Wyoming Department of Agriculture will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by marketing and promoting specialty crops; assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops; expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers through a variety of activities/projects with their grant recipients. The State's subawards include 1 research project, 3 education and outreach projects, and 1 project that crosses more than one focus area to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including mushrooms, vegetables, and cut flowers throughout the State of Wyoming.

Project Title	Location	Description	Project Budget
Improving Germination of Delicate Cut Flowers Through Media and Sowing Method Trials	Chugwater	The **Prairie View Community School** will conduct an applied research project aimed to improve germination success—more consistency, fewer seeding attempts, and less early crop loss—of delicate cut flowers, including lisianthus, stock, snapdragon, and scabiosa.	$17,188.00
Fifth Street Greenhouse Hydroponic System Expansion	Sheridan	**Sheridan County School District 2** will expand its production systems to include hydroponic ebb and flow beds to produce an increased variety of fresh vegetables to supplement the school lunch programs. The school district will also conduct programming such as tours and class events to students and other groups to learn more about specialty crop production.	$93,750.00
Enhancing Sustainability and Profitability of Gourmet Mushroom Production Using Locally Available Agricultural Residues	Laramie	This **University of Wyoming (UW)** project will support mushroom growers by characterizing and demonstrating the performance of low-cost agricultural residues as growing media. Educational materials and research results will be disseminated through UW Extension publications and workshops.	$49,105.50
Food Safety Certification Training for Wyoming Inspectors	Cheyenne	The **Wyoming Department of Agriculture** will partner with the Consumer Health Services Division to provide inspector training that directly supports state food safety goals. This training will support greater adherence to federal requirements for inspectors and oversight of food processors, particularly the state's acidified and low-acid canned food operations for specialty crop foods, to help better mitigate risks of severe foodborne illness outbreaks, such as Clostridium botulinum.	$61,624.20
Specialty Crop Small Grant Program	Cheyenne	The **Wyoming Department of Agriculture** will competitively award up to 5 small grants to producers, processors, local schools, community colleges, conservation districts, municipal governments, UWYO Extension, or other eligible nonprofit organizations to increase the availability and knowledge of specialty crops.	$68,418.00