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Vermont Agency of Agriculture Grants Over \$255K to Benefit Specialty Crop Producers

Six Agricultural Organizations Will Receive 2015 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program Funds

Montpelier – The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAFAM) announces grants totaling \$255,475 for eight projects to benefit Vermont fruit, vegetable, hops, maple, and added-value producers and increase consumer access to locally produced food. These grants, funded through the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service’s Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP), were awarded to six agricultural organizations to undertake a range of research, education, promotion, and program-building projects. The grants will leverage an additional \$300,000 in matching funds.

“Specialty Crop Block Grants are integral to maintaining a safe, sustainable, and secure food supply and to enhancing the Vermont brand,” said Agriculture Secretary Chuck Ross. “These funds will enable the Agency of Ag and our statewide partners to make strategic investments in research, infrastructure, and education to improve on-farm efficiency and safety, develop new marketing tools, open distribution channels to Vermont producers, and promote farm profitability. We are grateful to our Congressional delegation for their continued support of the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, which helps to boost Vermont’s agricultural economy and sustain our working landscape.”

University of Vermont Extension Agronomist Heather Darby is one of this year’s grantees and has received prior funding to study sustainable methods of pest control in specialty crops and to develop a mobile hop harvester—projects that have had a wide impact in Vermont and beyond. “Farmers from all over world have utilized our online Vermont Hops Project materials,” said Darby. “And our hop harvester design has been adopted by six different farms and businesses from several provinces and states outside of Vermont. The Specialty Crop Block Grant Program is a huge asset to our research projects and will allow us to continue to share new knowledge with farmers both inside and outside of Vermont.”

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Agricultural Marketing Service awards Specialty Crop Block Grants to the 50 States, the District of Columbia, and U.S. Territories. In Vermont, VAAFAM administers these funds to enhance the competitiveness of Vermont and regionally-grown specialty crops, defined as “fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops (including floriculture).”

VAAFAM awards SCBGP funds through a competitive review process guided by industry, nonprofit and government stakeholders. An independent stakeholder advisory committee identified economic impact across Vermont’s working landscape, environmental stewardship, and farm viability as funding goals for 2015. A proposal review committee selected the following projects out of fourteen applications representing total funding requests of over \$550,000:

- **University of Vermont Extension Northwest Crops & Soils Program** to evaluate the efficacy of biostimulants and biofungicides for downy and powdery mildew in specialty crops (\$33,485)
- The **Intervale Center** to develop the supply chain for Vermont-grown organic mesclun and frozen berries (\$5,057)
- The **Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont** (NOFA-VT) to build demand for fruits and vegetables in Vermont schools (\$35,500)
- The **Vermont Tree Fruit Growers Association** to utilize State Information Centers to promote direct marketing of Vermont apples, cider and wines (\$10,000)
- **University of Vermont Extension Center for Sustainable Agriculture** to pilot post-harvest management teams for the produce industry and conduct produce safety workshops to help farmers prepare for Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) implementation (\$58,177)
- **University of Vermont Proctor Maple Research Center** to enhance the competitiveness and economic sustainability of the maple industry (\$13,151)
- The Vermont Agency of Agriculture's Business Development Team to promote Vermont specialty crops in Japan (\$25,000)
- The **Vermont Agency of Agriculture's Produce Safety Team** to build a Vermont state produce safety and market access program (\$75,108)

To view the USDA-AMS press release announcing SCBGP awards nationally, visit <http://1.usa.gov/1P0qdJZ>.

To learn more about the Vermont SCBGP, visit <http://go.usa.gov/3uzFm>.

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About the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets: VAAFMM facilitates, supports and encourages the growth and viability of agriculture in Vermont while protecting the working landscape, human health, animal health, plant health, consumers and the environment. www.Agriculture.Vermont.Gov

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