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Vermont Agency of Agriculture Grants Over \$237K to Benefit Specialty Crop Producers

Four Agricultural Organizations Will Receive 2016 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program Funds

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAFAM) announces grants totaling \$237,845 for seven projects to benefit Vermont fruit, vegetable, 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 four agricultural organizations to undertake a range of technology development, research, education, marketing, and program-building projects. The grants will leverage an additional \$167,000 in matching funds.

"Specialty Crop Block Grants are critical 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, create jobs, and sustain our working landscape."

Since the program's formation in 2006, the Vermont SCBGP has invested over \$2.1 million in projects to benefit Vermont specialty crop producers, including the awards announced today. The program supports projects led by both agricultural service providers and producers, including a recently-completed project directed by Zack Woods Herb Farm (\$16,550 awarded in 2011), which helped to establish the [Vermont Herb Growers Cooperative](#) (VHGC), a cooperative business that provides a reliable marketing channel for high-quality herbs from small-scale, diversified Vermont farms.

The VHGC currently consists of eight founding member farms and offered 38 different dried herbs, five of which were also offered in their fresh form, over the 2016 season. Within the past year, VHGC built relationships with 15 mid to large-scale U.S. based herbal product companies including 3 located in Vermont. The Cooperative has made sales to 6 of these companies and are currently working to secure growing contracts with 3 more for the 2017 season.

VAAFAM awards SCBGP funds through a competitive review process guided by industry, nonprofit and government stakeholders. An independent stakeholder advisory committee identified the development of innovative horticultural production practices and efficiencies, pest and disease management, food safety, value chain enhancement, and market access as funding priorities for 2016. A proposal review committee selected the following projects out of thirty applications representing total funding requests of over \$911,000:

- **Upstream Ag/Pitchfork Farm** to develop a food-grade stainless steel leafy greens spinner and wash-line kit (\$18,000)

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- **University of Vermont Extension** to conduct field studies on maximizing nitrogen release from legume cover crops on Vermont vegetable farms (\$29,965)
- **University of Vermont Department of Plant & Soil Science** to field test plant essential oils and pest pheromones to control swede midge, an invasive pest of brassica crops (\$36,055)
- **University of Vermont Gund Institute for Ecological Economics** to develop management techniques for locally sourced native bees as alternative pollinators for Vermont specialty crops (\$13,151)
- The **Vermont Fresh Network** to increase the competitiveness of the Vermont wines in Vermont restaurants (\$20,000)
- **University of Vermont Department of Plant & Soil Science** to undertake a pest monitoring and management study to address the spread of leek moth and its impact on allium crops (\$39,023)
- The **Vermont Agency of Agriculture's Food Systems Section** to develop a direct to consumer marketing program (\$52,802)

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)."

To view the USDA-AMS press release announcing SCBGP awards nationally, visit <http://go.usa.gov/xkdbQ>. To learn more about the Vermont SCBGP, visit <http://bit.ly/vtscbpgp>.

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The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets 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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