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NEWS RELEASE

August 8, 2017

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WVDA ANNOUNCES PARTNERSHIP WITH SOUTHERN UNITED STATES TRADE ASSOCIATION

Charleston, WV - The West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA) has renewed its partnership with the Southern United States Trade Association (SUSTA). WVDA, SUSTA and state officials met in July to discuss potential partnership opportunities. From those discussions, training classes will be offered to assist West Virginia small agriculture-based businesses with state, regional, national and international marketing opportunities.

"Under the Agriculture Business Development Division, our mission is to help West Virginia agriculture-based businesses grow through in-house services or external partnerships. SUSTA is one of those vital partnerships that can help us reach that goal," stated Commissioner of Agriculture Kent Leonhardt. "We look forward to hosting seminars to help our businesses reach new markets that they may have not had the opportunity to before.

Governed by the 16 Southern Commissioners and Secretaries of Agriculture, SUSTA was formed in 1974 to serve the agriculture industries of the southeast. WVDA played a critical role in its formation. As the West Virginia Commissioner of Agriculture, Kent Leonhardt sits on their board of directors.

"SUSTA is helping businesses such as Inwood's Doc's Tea reach international markets like China. What businesses might not know is there are numerous considerations when exploring these international markets, like language requirements and food regulations specific to that country. SUSTA is able to provide tools that we at the department may not have," stressed WVDA Agriculture Business Development Director Cassey Bowden.

SUSTA offers a 50% cost share program to help small businesses that need capital support to grow their brand internationally. Items that can be paid for under this cost share program include: travel, advertisement, website development for foreign markets and part-time contracting support. SUSTA aided the export of \$476,296,068 worth of goods last year.

"West Virginia has always had a voice at the table, but under Commissioner Leonhardt's administration we are exploring additional avenues to help West Virginia small businesses. We are excited to work hand in hand with the WVDA to offer more services to these businesses that want to explore new markets," said SUSTA Executive Director Bernadette Wiltz. "International markets are always hungry for more American products. The potential is huge for West Virginia businesses."

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