

**News Release**  
**9-25-13**

**COMMISSIONER OF AGRICULTURE WALT HELMICK ANNOUNCES  
2013 SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT AWARD RECIPIENTS**

West Virginia Agriculture Commissioner Walt Helmick has announced the projects selected for the 2013 round of the USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Program-Farm Bill (SCBGP-FB). Funding is provided for state selected projects that solely enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops including fruits, vegetables, horticulture products, honey, maple syrup and Christmas trees. For 2013, West Virginia was allocated \$186,184.39 for projects that were proposed and evaluated under a competitive review process. Sixteen projects of the 34 submitted concepts were approved for funding and included in the West Virginia State Plan.

Commissioner Helmick noted an emphasis on projects that include research, increased production, and promotion of specialty crops in the state especially targeting young and beginning farmers.

“In order to make additional crops available to our residents, these projects must focus on the key areas that will allow agriculture production to increase,” said Commissioner Helmick. “By focusing on the opportunities, challenges and threats to our industry through these grants, we will be better able to meet the needs of our farmers and their work to expand their marketplace presence.”

The following grants were approved for funding:

**FAYETTE COUNTY**

**Recipient: Fayette County Schools** *“Kitchen Garden, Seed to Plate for Better Tasting Fruits and Vegetables”*

For students at Oak Hill High School, a school garden will be the classroom for science, biology, family and consumer science, and ProStart classes as they build and grow specialty crops using small container gardening techniques. The garden will provide a living laboratory for career exploration and nutrition education as healthy eating becomes an integral part of the Farm to School curriculum development at the school.

**Recipient: National Coal Heritage Highway Authority** *“Bramwell Farmers’ Market and Healthy Eating Education”*

The recently opened Bramwell Farmers’ Market in Mercer County is the site of this project that focuses on access to local, fresh and healthy specialty crops. Project activities include free classes emphasizing local culture, knowledge of healthy eating and best practices for preparing and preserving specialty crops.

**JACKSON COUNTY**

**Recipient: Jackson County Commission/West Virginia University Jackson County Extension Service**  
*“Late Season Variety Trail”*

Expanding market windows beyond typical production windows through season extension is the focus of this research based project. Five different watermelon varieties will be examined for yield, length of season, consumer preference and marketability through a cooperative effort of Jackson County growers.

**KANAWHA COUNTY**

**Recipient: Capitol Conservation District** *“Soil Tunnel Trailer”*

Educating students through a hands-on experience with a mobile “Soil Trailer” will develop an understanding of the importance of soil to the growing of specialty crops in the state. The soil tunnel simulation will expose 6th grade students throughout the state about the need for healthy soil to grow healthy food while addressing key Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) curriculum objectives.

**Recipient: West Virginia State University Research and Development**  
*“Specialty Hops Production in West Virginia”*

The craft brewing industry is undergoing a resurgence but the production of the key ingredient, hops, is nonexistent. This project will explore the production potential in West Virginia through survey; a three-season grower trial to determine yield, plant vigor and pest management techniques; and conclude with general public information sessions to share results and determine grower interest in future plantings.

*“Specialty Mushroom Cultivation in Urban and Rural West Virginia”*

The development of two demonstration sites aimed at traditional and urban mushroom production will be the focus of this project. The trials will provide data on five species to determine future research and replication needs throughout the state. Public workshops for at least 125 participants aim to increase mushroom production and sales.

**Recipient: West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA)**

*“2014 West Virginia Wine Trail Promotion”*

Nineteen licensed wineries dot the West Virginia landscape, growing grapes for production and hosting visitors for tastings and events. To meet the need for increased exposure and marketing, the WVDA will gather data and produce a print and electronic directory to provide information and resources to visitors and provide a valuable link between specialty crops and agritourism.

*“2014 Specialty Crop Producer Education Program”*

The 2011 federal Food Safety and Mechanization Act has provided the impetus for increased focus on training and certification in both the production and processing venues of agriculture. This project will provide training in Good Handling Practices (GHP)/Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), Hazard and Critical Control Point (HACCP) Analysis, Better Process Control School (BPS), MarketReady™ producer marketing education, and Annie’s Project Risk Management training at reduced costs to West Virginia farmers and processors.

**MINERAL COUNTY**

**Recipient: Potomac State College of West Virginia University**

*“Potomac State College Farm to School Cool Season Vegetable Production:”*

Taking the Farm to School concept to higher education is the focus of this educational based program. Students will create a learning model using vegetable crop production in an innovative high tunnel selling the results to the campus food service program. Students will lead the program and report their detailed recordkeeping results at a future West Virginia Small Farm Conference.

**MONONGALIA COUNTY**

**Recipient: West Virginia University**

*“Novel Approaches to Nematode Management in Peach and Apple”*

This project addresses the research needs presented by the challenge of nematode infestation in the state’s apple and peach crops. The research will conduct a trial study to determine the effectiveness of new biocontrol agents and their effectiveness on controlling this pest that threatens both production and salability of two of the state’s most important orchard crops.

*“Using Experiential Learning to Promote and Increase Maple Syrup Production in West Virginia”*

With the tree resources in the state to become the nation’s 6th largest producer of maple syrup, this project will provide demonstration workshops, development of a youth education and entrepreneurship course and technical assistance to establish, promote and expand West Virginia’s industry.

**Recipient: West Virginia University Extension Small Farm Center**

*“Marinara Sauce - Good on Pasta and Great for the Economy”*

Promoting further processing of specialty crops and a diverse marketplace, this project will explore the production, processing, marketing and distribution of tomatoes as marinara sauce for distribution to schools, institutions and homes in West Virginia. A detailed enterprise development plan will be developed to expand the network of business development in value-added specialty crop production.

**PUTNAM COUNTY**

**Recipient: West Teays Elementary School**

*“Black’s Brainy Botanist”*

The teachers of West Teays Elementary will partner with the Putnam County Master Gardeners (PCMG) and the WVU Extension Service and utilize grant funding for a student-based high tunnel with raised beds. Students will attempt to raise their WTEST scores through experiential teaching, master content standards and develop an interest in food production while supplying the school cafeteria and local food bank with nutritious food.

**RALEIGH COUNTY**

**Recipient: Tamarack: The Best of West Virginia**

The Tamarack Farmers’ Market is in its second year of operation providing a venue to local and out-of-state visitors for specialty, horticulture and value-added crops. Grant funds will be used for future marketing efforts that emphasize

education, support and exploration of the nutritional benefits of consumption to the consumer while stimulating the local agricultural economy.

**ROANE COUNTY**

**Recipient: Tri-County Partnership for Mid-Ohio Valley Growers Association**

Lack of locally grown food in the county schools, restaurants, institutions and retail outlets are the challenges addressed by this project. Development of a framework for food security and economic development in rural Appalachian communities through decreased dependence on imported foods are the expected outcomes of the program. Activities include utilization of season extension production, online order system development, brand development and aggregation for increased capacity.

**UPSHUR COUNTY**

**Recipient: New Appalachia Farm & Research Center (NAFRC)**

Partnering with the Farm to School initiative in more than half of West Virginia school systems, NAFRC will explore the new school meal pattern and its impact on specialty crop production in the state. Demand for romaine lettuce, tomatoes, sweet potatoes, butternut squash and carrots to fulfill the pattern requirements mean opportunity for farmers throughout the state. A training program for school cooks on product preparation and packaging, integration of specialty crops into the Tucker County ProStart and Agricultural Education Program, and recipe testing by students at an Upshur County School will highlight the activities of the grant jointly sponsored by the Office of Child Nutrition in the West Virginia Department of Education.

For more information contact the WVDA's Marketing & Development Division at 304-558-2210.