

News Release

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AGRICULTURAL RESEARCHERS TO RECEIVE QUARTER MILLION IN GRANT FUNDING

The West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA) will award nearly \$250,000 in 2014 Specialty Crop Block Grants to 14 recipients throughout West Virginia.

The awards are part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Specialty Crop Block Grant Program. They are administered in West Virginia by the WVDA.

The grant program encourages cooperative efforts to integrate technology at the farm level, improve marketing and promotion of locally grown specialty crops, and increase production efficiency through research projects.

Specialty crops include fruits, vegetables, herbs, horticulture goods, nursery stock and value-added products.

The following projects (in no particular order) have been awarded grants for the current funding cycle:

1. **"Assessing Opportunities for Maple Syrup Production on Abandoned Mine Lands"**
West Virginia University Research Corporation, \$17,350, Monongalia County. This project will examine sap quality from maples on mine lands and create demonstration areas to showcase new potential sap extraction techniques and increase West Virginia production of maple products.
2. **"Cryopreservation of Honey Bee Germplasm"**
West Virginia Queen Producers Association, \$9,500, Jefferson County. Cryopreserved honey bee germplasm can provide a resource for the preservation of diversity and recovery of endangered populations. The project will preserve and improve honey production by acquiring a complete system for cryopreservation of honeybee germplasm, along with the appropriate knowledge to implement this technology.
3. **"KISRA Farm Expansion"**
Kanawha Institute for Social Research & Action, Inc. (KISRA), \$10,000, Kanawha County. This SpecialtyCrop Block Grant will provide a scientific study assessing the productivity and profitability of two growing systems of specialty crops (hydroponics and vertical towers) while imparting valuable job skill sets in urban and alternate growing systems. KISRA will partner with West Virginia State University for this study and conduct the comparative analysis.
4. **"Maple Syrup Producers Association"**
West Virginia Maple Syrup Producers Association and West Virginia Department of Agriculture, \$7,200, statewide. With more than 1 million estimated untapped trees in the state, according to a recent Cornell report, the inventory and industry potential for maple syrup is just beginning to be uncovered in West Virginia. The specialty crop block grant for this group will be used to develop basic organizational development, create brand awareness for maple syrup, and develop educational tools for the newly formed Association.
5. **"Maximizing Profitability and Productivity for Sustainable Multiple Vegetable Crop Production in West Virginia High Tunnels"**
West Virginia State University Research and Development Corporation, \$16,000, Kanawha County. The project will undertake research with four growers to investigate crops, production and economic returns on vegetables grown in high tunnels to develop recommendations for high tunnels in West Virginia. Draft production schedules and enterprise budgets will be produced as well as grower training sessions for new and developing high tunnel producers.
6. **"Mobile Vegetable Post Harvest Project"**
West Virginia Department of Agriculture with assistance from Potomac State University, \$43,231, statewide. This project will develop a prototype mobile wash unit that can be transported to farmers' markets and other crop aggregation sites in West Virginia, connected with municipal and approved water sources and allow access to farmers for safe post-harvest washing. The building blueprint will focus on an economical design

and be made available for replication in the form of a how-to manual and will feature a unique partnership with the Agriculture Mechanic students at Potomac State University.

7. **"Pecan Production and Demonstration in West Virginia"**

West Virginia State University, \$14,000, Kanawha County. After the 1940s, commercial production of pecans ceased in West Virginia. This represents a huge opportunity for West Virginia small farmers and small forest landowners to become the first to look at the re-introduction of pecan production. The project are will educate landowners on the steps they would need to take to begin pecan production and how to care for and maintain the pecan trees and the development of pecan groves.

8. **"Ritchie County Farmers Market Association Specialty Crop Production and Market Storage Improvement Project"**

Ritchie County Farmers Market Association, \$10,000, Ritchie County. Grant funds will be used to purchase a bed shaper/mulch layer, transplanter, mulch lifter, and portable cooling trailer for local producers to use on a shared basis and with a nominal fee. At the completion of the project, the market will experience increased sales and provide additional specialty crop resources for the community.

9. **"Sage II - Perennial Produce"**

CADCO Foundation dba Charleston Area Alliance, \$16,000, Kanawha County. Due to market demand from the past year, SAGE II will explore the growing of asparagus, strawberries, artichoke, and horseradish at five different urban sites. The program will determine which varieties grow the best as well as what conditions produce the best produce for use at market. Varieties will be evaluated on ease of planting and tending, amount of produce produced, ease of sale at market and market value.

10. **"Techniques for Increasing the Supply of Fresh, Locally Grown Produce in the Tygarts Valley District"**

Eastern West Virginia Community Action Agency, \$12,000, Tucker County. The Tygarts Valley District has many small farmers who seek to supplement their income by growing produce for resale. Since farming is often an additional enterprise for these individuals they often do not have the tools to maximize their return, nor is it feasible for them to invest in equipment at such low levels of production. This project will attempt to help with these problems by providing some community equipment (i.e. water wheel planter) to be used to local growers to improve their efficiency in transplanting bedding plants. The other major component is a partnership with WVU Extension Service and Tucker County High School to provide the education to the growers to help them improve yields and efficiency.

11. **"Vineyard Hills Orchards" Grow Ohio Valley, Inc., \$25,000, Ohio County.**

Through an innovative land-use partnership, this project will transform a highly visible brownfield into a fertile bramble and fruit tree orchard and intends to fill a gaping hole in unsatisfied demand for local fresh fruits in the Wheeling area. The project will also provide a venue for vocational skills and farming techniques training for new farmers and economically and socially disadvantaged populations.

12. **"West Virginia Department of Agriculture Specialty Crop Producer Education 2014-2015"**

West Virginia Department of Agriculture on behalf of state specialty crop growers, \$51,500, statewide. This project continues several ongoing programs and introduces new trainings to provide West Virginia specialty crop producers with the most recent training and business development to increase their production and footprint on the state's economy. Courses and programs include GHP/GAP training (8 hour introductory course), FSI: Food Safety Investigation curriculum (for high school agriculture instructors), Recall/HACCP training, a new Food Safety Plan Writing workshop, support of the specialty crop segment of the new agritourism course, Better Process Control School (BPCS), and MarketReady™ curriculums available to agriculture and agriculture service providers throughout the state.

13. **"West Virginia Veterans to Agriculture Honey Production Project"**

West Virginia Veterans to Agriculture Program, \$15,000, statewide. Agriculture and agribusiness enterprises have become popular activities for veterans re-entering the workforce after their service commitment. The West Virginia Veterans to Agriculture Program has been created to address the needs of these farmers and boosts more than 100 active participants throughout the state. To meet the demand for local honey and interest generated by veterans in this enterprise, the project will train, provide basic processing resources and increase participation in beekeeping throughout the state.

"Wildflowers for Honeybees"

West Central Beekeepers Association with the Calhoun County Commission, \$3,100, Calhoun County. West Central

Beekeepers Association (WCBA) is made up of beekeepers from Calhoun, Roane, and surrounding counties in West Virginia. The project will seek to increase and stabilize the honey bee population in their geographical area in an effort to produce more honey for sale and local crop pollination. This will include the introduction of Honey Bee Wildflower Seed Mix to be sown as an additional food source to expand the number of honey bees and help stabilize their environment by providing appropriate food sources, enabling them to survive.