

Maryland Announces Grant Awardees for Specialty Crops Selected Projects include Food Safety, Sod, Christmas Trees, and Wine

ANNAPOLIS, MD (Sept. 17, 2010) – The Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) today announced winners of \$387,455 in grants that will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops in Maryland. The U.S. Department of Agriculture Specialty Crop Block Grant Program was authorized under the Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004, and amended under the 2008 Farm Bill. Funding is expected to be made available to MDA for the specialty crop block grants from 2010 through 2012.

“We are pleased to announce awardees of the Maryland Specialty Crop Block Grant Program. The 2008 Farm Bill provided significant grant funding dedicated to specialty crops to become available,” said Agriculture Secretary Buddy Hance. “These funds are a great opportunity to help farmers and value-added producers advance and promote local specialty crops in the marketplace and help keep Maryland smart, green and growing.”

The following is a snapshot of the eight selected projects:

- Barr-Net, Inc. – \$18,500 – to develop and field trial biodegradable sod production netting and roll wrap from keratin (protein from chicken and turkey feathers) for Maryland’s sod production industry. The overall objective is to develop technologies to support Maryland sod farmers’ commitment to producing sod in an environmentally responsible manner.
- Crossroads Farmers Market – \$25,000 – to increase specialty crop sales of fruits and vegetables to low-income populations in eight Maryland communities. The campaign promotes usage of the new Women, Infant, Children (WIC) Fruit and Vegetable Check (FVC) at farmers markets, particularly those offering double value coupons for eligible clients.
- Hoopla, Inc. – \$25,000 – to produce a one-hour documentary film entitled "Maryland on the Menu" to promote: a new respect for local growers; an emphasis on healthy eating; skill in adapting local products to various ethnic and foreign cuisines; and a new interest in Maryland local culinary traditions and heirloom varieties.
- Maryland Agricultural Resource Council – \$25,000 – to maintain the “New Farmer Trainee Program (NFTP, which assists highly motivated novice farmers to gain sufficient farming experience over a one year period to enable them to start farming independently.
- Maryland Christmas Tree Association (MCTA) – \$43,638 – to continue the state wide marketing and communications campaign “Buy Local-Buy Real” to inform consumers of the benefits of selecting real Maryland Christmas trees and purchasing them at local farms. This year, MCTA is working with the Embassy of the Republic of Latvia and the American Latvian Association to promote the celebration of the 500 year anniversary of the first decorated Christmas tree which occurred in Riga, Latvia.

- Maryland Wineries Association – \$40,000 – to create, promote and manage four new public events in 2011 featuring Maryland wine and specialty crops. The events will be branded “Eat Drink Go Local: Maryland’s Best,” combining local agricultural and tourism themes. Each of these events would focus on wine and the produce available at the moment, focusing on regionality and seasonality of our fine local farm products. The events will be located in small, historic towns throughout the state, bringing tourists into rural areas.

- Maryland Department of Agriculture
 - o \$177,702 – to reduce economic and technical assistance barriers facing Maryland fresh fruit and vegetable producers in implementing an effective food safety program and to continue a specialized, cost effective program for direct marketers
 - o \$32,615 – to establish a voluntary statewide database containing specific information on specialty crops produced in Maryland that will help pesticide applicators identify locations where extra care should be taken to protect specialty crops from harmful pesticide exposure.

Specialty crops are defined as fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops.

MDA created a competitive grant process with a review committee to award these federal funds in 2009. Funding priorities, identified by Maryland specialty crop producers, included: marketing with Maryland’s Best, food safety, and producer innovation.