

MDA Awards Specialty Crop Block Grants for Research, Education, and Market Development

St. Paul, Minn. – The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) has awarded 2018 USDA Specialty Crop Block Grants (SCBG) to sixteen recipient organizations across Minnesota. The grant program aims to boost the competitiveness of specialty crops grown in Minnesota through research, education, or market development projects, such as development of new plant varieties, marketing campaigns, and helping producers to comply with food safety requirements.

“Minnesota vegetable growers need crop varieties well-adapted to their environmental conditions, farming systems and market demands,” said Kitt Healy of Organic Seed Alliance, a SCBG grantee. “This is especially true for organic growers, who depend heavily on crop genetics to optimize production. With the support of MDA's Specialty Crop Block Grant program, we will be working with farmers to evaluate open pollinated pepper varieties for adaptation to local farm environments, and for potential on-farm breeding.” Healy says the project also builds vegetable farmers' capacity to do on-farm seed saving and breeding through educational workshops.

“At a time when our rural economy is struggling, these Specialty Crop Block Grants provide the foundation for a better and more diverse ag sector,” said MDA Assistant Commissioner Whitney Place. “The information that is learned through these grants has great potential to help Minnesota farmers.”

The 2019 SCBG Request for Proposals, including the online application, will be available in December 2018 at <http://www.mda.state.mn.us/specialtycrop>. Applicants may request between \$10,000 and \$100,000 and projects may last up to two-and-a-half years. Applications are due at 4:00 p.m. on Thursday, March 7, 2019. Questions may be directed to Ann Kuzj (Ann.Kuzj@state.mn.us) or the MDA Grants Line at 651-201-6500.

2018 Awarded Specialty Crop Block Grant Projects

Grantee Organization Name	Counties or Area of Project Impacted	Project Summary
Farmers' Legal Action Group, Inc.	Ramsey, Dakota, Washington, St. Louis, Carver, Sterns, Benton	Farmers' Legal Action Group will author, publish, and conduct ten workshops with six partners over two years on a "Specialty Crop Farmers' & Marketers' Guide to the Food Safety Modernization Act," targeting socially disadvantaged and beginning farmers.
Indigenous Peoples Task Force	MN Statewide	Initiative to reduce health disparities in Native American communities by improving production of health targeted sweet potato and increasing access to sweet potato through education and design of value added baby food and maternal health products.
Minnesota Department of Agriculture	MN Statewide	This campaign increases revenue for apple growers by developing the market for new, early season apple varieties at retail orchards and grocery stores.
Minnesota Farmers' Market Association	MN Statewide	Minnesota specialty crop grower organizations will work to combine their annual conferences into one annual conference, maximizing educational efforts and minimizing costs.

<p>Minnesota Grown Promotion Group</p>	<p>MN Statewide</p>	<p>This project increases sales of MN specialty crops through statewide marketing including sponsored search advertising (pay-per-click), promoted social media posts, and promotion of specific specialty crops in the printed Minnesota Grown Directory.</p>
<p>Minnesota Nursery & Landscape Association</p>	<p>MN Statewide</p>	<p>The overall goal of this project is to reduce the incidence of drift and carryover injury in MN nurseries by finding the levels and times of applications of glyphosate and dicamba that are least problematic to nursery stock.</p>
<p>Organic Seed Alliance</p>	<p>MN, WI & IA</p>	<p>This project improves the quality and availability of sweet peppers adapted to Minnesota organic agriculture while increasing farmers' capacity to do on-farm breeding projects and engage with grassroots efforts to strengthen the regional seed system.</p>
<p>Renewing the Countryside II</p>	<p>MN Statewide</p>	<p>This project builds upon and enhances the Farmers' Market Aggregation project that develops new sales for specialty crop farmers to wholesale buyers. In addition, we will conduct a financial analysis to evaluate the sustainability of this system.</p>
<p>Sustainable Farming Association</p>	<p>MN Statewide</p>	<p>The Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota (SFA) will work with beginning and operating farmers to increase production of asparagus in Minnesota through improved soil health practices, and expand supply chain networks and markets.</p>

University of Minnesota	MN Statewide	Researchers will improve Deep Winter Greenhouse designs, create business planning and financing tools, and conduct workshops in winter production.
University of Minnesota	Ramsey, Hennepin, Rice, Anoka, Waseca	This project will investigate a number of aspects of goji berry as a new crop to Minnesota farmers, which include to select elite traits, develop techniques for clonal propagation, establish a long-term trial location(s), and breed for new cultivars.
University of Minnesota	MN Statewide	This is a collaborative effort between the University of Minnesota Northwest Research & Outreach Center and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture to develop drone-based remote sensing techniques for Potato Virus Y, a severely limiting disease in seed potato production.
University of Minnesota	MN Statewide	The Department of Entomology will develop new early warning forecast tools for specialty crop (raspberry, grape) growers in Minnesota to aid in managing the invasive Japanese beetle, which has recently been defoliating these crops.
University of Minnesota	Statewide MN and ND	Evaluation of the effects of soil (terroir) and harvest timing on two cold hardy hybrid grape varieties, Marquette and Brianna, grown in Minnesota and North Dakota.

University of Minnesota	MN Statewide	This project provides food safety education and technical assistance to Minnesota specialty crop growers, helping them prepare for FSMA Produce Safety Rule implementation through creation of an online GAPs training program and in-person workshops.
University of Minnesota	MN Statewide	This project will test cellphone record keeping app designs and improve a Beta version to produce a version that can be released to farmers to help them comply with requirements of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA).