

Connecticut Specialty Crop Block Grants Awards FY 2006-2011

For years 2006 and 2007, the Connecticut Department of Agriculture was issued \$215,869.24 to:

- Produce banners promoting farmers' markets.
- Purchase four costumes that will help school food service directors, schools, and other groups promote specialty crops in cafeterias and produce coloring books promoting the Farm-to-School Program and the use of "Connecticut Grown" specialty crops.
- Conduct two farm tours/workshops for local chefs to teach them about "Connecticut Grown" specialty crops; work with the "Connecticut Grown" Farmers' Market program to arrange culinary demonstrations at the markets by program chefs; support a farm-to-chef program meeting; and develop a farm-to-chef program logo and promotional materials.
- Develop a farm stand brochure that will allow the public to find farm stands and stores in their area.
- Provide producers, wholesalers, retailers and other outlets with promotional items to identify and promote "Connecticut Grown" specialty crop products.
- Conduct market research to determine the effectiveness of a state-wide, multi-media advertising and marketing campaign promoting "Connecticut Grown" products conducted in 2007.
- Partner with the Connecticut Apple Marketing Board to develop a brochure and redesign the Board's website to increase apple sales in Connecticut.
- Conduct a one-day "bee school" to help existing beekeepers become better and newcomers to be successful, and develop a brochure and update the Connecticut Beekeepers Association web site.
- Award three scholarships to candidates studying agriculture, provide grants to the State of Connecticut Agriculture Experiment Station to conduct experiments to help tree growers, promote the annual coloring contest and award trees to eight winners, and update and maintain the Connecticut Christmas Tree Growers Association website.
- Print passports that visitors can get stamped at each Connecticut winery to entice customers to visit different wineries in partnership with the Connecticut Farm Wine Development Council.
- Conduct a two-year promotional campaign promoting "Connecticut Grown" annual flowering plants in partnership with the Connecticut Greenhouse Growers Association and the Connecticut Nursery and Landscape Association.
- Produce and distribute copies of the CT NOFA Farm and Food Guide, a listing of organic and sustainable farms in Connecticut in partnership with the Northeast Organic Farming Association.

- Conduct a two-year promotional campaign for “Connecticut Grown” trees, shrubs, and perennial plants in partnership with the Connecticut Nursery and Landscape Association and the Connecticut Greenhouse Growers Association.
- Conduct educational programs for producers at the semi-annual Maple Syrup Producers Association of Connecticut meetings to learn more about the maple syrup craft and be better informed to make upgrades to their operations, advertise the presence of sugaring operations and create syrup samplers kits to educate the public, and compile and publish the CT Maple Syrup Recipe Book.
- Continue to promote specialty crops from a regional and state perspective and support the Harvest New England conference in the winter of 2009 with a focus on marketing in partnership with the Harvest New England group.

In 2008, the Connecticut Department of Agriculture was issued \$116,864.85 to:

Coordinate with Connecticut’s Department of Public Works and the Connecticut Marketing Authority to develop a design for a new facility at the Hartford Regional Market that will incorporate new vendor stalls that will promote additional specialty crop vendors.

In 2008, the Connecticut Department of Agriculture was awarded \$123,322.00 to fund 3 projects that will:

- Partner with the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station to conduct varietal trials and cultural experiments on ethnic vegetables at two research farms and distribute fact sheets and bulletins after the trials and experiments are completed describing the suggested varieties and cultural techniques required to successfully grow these ethnic vegetables.
- Partner with the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station to determine the best pruning and training systems for widely grown hybrid wine grape cultivars, evaluate new vinifera and hybrid wine grape cultivars suitable for the state, and examine how planting Vitis vinifera cultivars with elevated graft unions could result in increased productivity by reducing inputs to offset the increased cost of plant material.
- Partner with the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station to field test hybrid strawberry breeding lines tolerant of both root weevils and black root rot in growers’ fields under commercial production conditions to determine horticultural acceptability and continue to quantify and assess resistance and/or tolerance to black root rot and black vine weevil in elite strawberry breeding lines.

In 2009, the Connecticut Department of Agriculture was awarded \$320,502.74 to fund 10 projects that will:

- Work with USDA Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) training requirements and establish a uniform food-safety GAP program in Connecticut by training a Connecticut Department of

Agriculture employee to become a licensed authority to conduct USDA GAP audits throughout Connecticut.

- Conduct a needs assessment conference, web site, training programs and written informational materials to enable Connecticut farmers to prepare for Good Agricultural Practices audits and/or meet increased consumer demand for evidence of safe food handling when growing, harvesting and handling fresh fruits and vegetables
- Implement a fifty percent cost-share reimbursement program up to \$500 to become USDA Good Agricultural Practices certified
- Partner with the University of Connecticut to: develop a budget generator suitable to analyze the expected profitability of multiyear specialty crops; estimate cost and profitability of grape production for winemaking for representative farms under alternative technological assumptions; examine the potential market for locally produced grapes as an input to Connecticut wine producers; and implement outreach programs to disseminate information concerning the expected profitability and prospects of expanded grape production
- Partner with the Connecticut Greenhouse Growers Association (CGGA) and Connecticut Nursery & Landscape Association (CNLA) to increase sales of CT Grown ornamental plants by focusing consumers' attention on 36 specific plants, one each month, over a three-year period
- Host the 50th Anniversary of the Connecticut Christmas Tree Growers Association, Inc. to provide current education information to Christmas Tree growers to help them increase their sales
- Partner with the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station to: develop greenhouse environment and fertilizer protocols to maintain high nutritional values of vegetable crops grown in various seasons of the year; determine the nutritional value of locally grown salad greens and compare these values to those of the same crops available in supermarkets that were produced in distant regions; and disseminate this information to the agricultural and farming community and the public
- Partner with the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station to use biochar and earthworms in experimental field plots to demonstrate the value of these treatments in establishing asparagus fields
- Partner with the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station to develop an environmentally friendly biological control method against bacterial spot, using natural enemies of the pathogen, called bacteriophages or phages (viruses that attack bacteria) to ensure better yield, reduce chemical pesticide input in the environment and allow organic production of stone fruits in Connecticut
- Perform pre-award activities in order to administrate the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program funding and ensure that the State Agency and sub-awardees abide by Federal and State requirements and regulations

In 2010, the Connecticut Department of Agriculture was awarded \$442,964.50 to fund 9 projects. They are:

Agency Project

Increasing the Competitiveness of CT Grown Specialty Crops Through Promotional Materials, *CT Department of Agriculture, Marketing Division*. The CT Department of Agriculture (DoAG) Marketing Division is requesting \$75,000.00 in Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) – Farm Bill funding to purchase a variety of promotional materials with which to identify and market the state's specialty crops. 3 year project. \$75,000

Sub-Grantee Projects

1. Expanding Consumer Recognition of the CT Wine Industry, *CT Vineyard & Winery Association*. The applicant requests \$75,000 to support a two-year statewide marketing campaign to increase adult consumption of Connecticut's specialty crops of grapes and other fruits for winemaking. 2 year project. \$75,000
2. Bringing Deep Zone Tillage to CT & New England Vegetable Farms, *University of Connecticut, Cooperative Extension System*. This project would consist of soil health surveys, DZT research, and a sequence of outreach meetings and articles, all with the goal of hastening the adoption of DZT in Connecticut and New England. 1 year project. \$34,109.90
3. Natural Beekeeping Methods in Connecticut, *Massaro Community Farms*. The Connecticut Beekeeper's Association, Massaro Community Farm, and Massaro Farm CSA will collaborate to establish an apiary at the Massaro Farm in Woodbridge, CT. The apiary will provide, among other things, educational programs to the community, research opportunities for the industry, and potentially increase the pollination and production of honey in Connecticut. 3 year project. \$33,120
4. Maple Products Growth Proposal Project, *Maple Syrup Producers Association of Connecticut*. Connecticut's maple industry is comprised of primarily small producers, tapping less than 1% of Connecticut sugar maples. Eighty percent of maple syrup products purchased in Connecticut are supplied by Canada. The potential exists to substantially increase the production/dollar value of Connecticut maple products among existing operators with a three pronged approach. (1) Increase the number of maple trees tapped. Promote environmentally sustainable forest management by Connecticut land owners through increased use of the lands for maple syrup production. (2) Enhance current equipment to achieve significantly increased productivity in current operations. New environmentally friendly technologies (vs. 10 years ago) have *quadrupled* syrup yield per tap and output per energy unit while significantly lowering operating costs with virtually no increase in carbon emissions. (3) Develop a marketing model that includes Connecticut maple sales in high traffic

retail outlets in addition to current specialty stores, farmers' markets, and farm stands. 2 year project. \$28,800

5. Winter Food: Growing, storing, marketing & cooking specialty crops for the cold season, *CT Northeast Organic Farming Association*. Designed to increase the availability, sales, and consumption of locally-grown, organic and sustainable fruits, vegetables and herbs in the winter; for two years *Winter Food* will build on CT NOFA's educational and communications resources to 1) educate farmers in the best practices for growing, storing, and marketing winter crops, and 2) educate consumers about the availability, flavor, and nutrition of those fruits, vegetables, and herbs. 2 year project. \$73,346

6. Genetic Improvement of Christmas Trees for Connecticut Farms, *CT Christmas Tree Growers Association*. Ensuring that locally grown trees are of superior quality is an essential competitive advantage. Critical needs to ensure superior quality are improvements in needle retention properties and resistance to *Phytophthora* root rot, which limits production of highly valuable true firs. Field tests of different provenances of Canaan fir, Turkish fir, and Nordmann fir will be conducted at cooperating growers' fields and at CT Agricultural Experiment Station (CAES) farms to determine those with the best characteristics. Additional tests of other species and hybrid firs will take place at the CAES Valley Laboratory, for which this grant will support the nursery production of the seedlings to be subjected to testing. The best trees from both screening activities will be transplanted to the CAES Griswold Farm to establish a permanent seed production nursery to sustain a competitive CT Christmas tree production. 3 year project. \$36,092

7. Evaluating landscape adaptability of novel native shrubs as alternatives to invasive exotics for the nursery industry, *University of Connecticut, Department of Plant Science*. There is increased interest in using native plant alternatives to invasive species for landscaping. developed. Some native Connecticut shrub species, for which little is known regarding their landscape adaptability, include beaked filbert (*Corylus cornuta*), eastern sandcherry (*Prunus pumila* var. *depressa*), hardhack (*Spiraea tomentosa*), shining sumac (*Rhus copallina*), sweetgale (*Myrica gale*) and sweetfern (*Comptonia peregrina*). These species will be evaluated for their adaptability to parking lot island plantings and residential landscapes to determine which can serve as suitable replacements for barberry and euonymus. The benefits of mulching and irrigating native plants during establishment will also be studied. Transitioning from invasive species to native species will be more successful if growers, landscapers, and homeowners know which native plants can perform well in challenging landscape situations currently occupied by invasive species. 3 year project. \$55,892

Multistate Project

Increasing the Competitiveness of New England Specialty Crops Through the Harvest New England Association. Harvest New England Association, Inc. (HNE) is a non-profit corporation established in 1992 consisting of the six New England State

Department of Agriculture, marketing division bureau directors. HNE developed a marketing program to identify regionally produced specialty crops to New Englanders making it easier for consumers to buy regional produce.

HNE will use the HNE logo in a variety of venues, marketing methods, and through an educational three-day conference. The goal is to increase use of the logo by producers, wholesalers, and grocery stores. This increased use will raise awareness and visibility of the logo and therefore awareness and visibility of regionally produced specialty crop products. 2 year project. \$7,993

In 2011, the Connecticut Department of Agriculture was awarded \$429,936.10 to fund 8 projects. They are:

1. Partner with Connecticut Department of Consumer Protection to provide food safety training to registered specialty crop farmers who produce processed foods, such as jams and jellies. Training on FDA's Good Manufacturing Practices and Process Control will educate on-farm producers on the sanitary processing requirements for producing safe and wholesome food. Award Amount \$29,162.50
2. Provide a bilingual English/Spanish cookbook customized to promote Connecticut specialty crops by featuring local fruit and vegetable recipes along with incentives for Women, Infant and Children Farmers' Market Nutrition Program participants to purchase their fruits and vegetables at local farmers markets. The project staff has established checks and balances to ensure that the specialty crop cookbook and incentives only benefit specialty crops. Award Amount \$85,470
3. Partner with Wholesome Wave Foundation to provide Wholesome Wave's Double Value Coupon Program so Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program recipients can double the value of benefits redeemed for fruits and vegetables at farm-to-market retail venues. The project staff has developed specific guidelines that state the program partners can only use doubling incentives to pay for locally grown fruits and vegetables. Award Amount \$75,000
4. Partner with Connecticut Nursery & Landscape Association to determine what motivates Connecticut consumers to purchase landscape plants, and then encourage local growers to meet those expectations in the plants they choose to produce; in efforts to increase demand and purchase of ornamental plants grown by Connecticut nurseries and greenhouses. Award Amount: \$35,000
5. Partner with Rhode Island Center for Agricultural Promotion and Education to provide Connecticut's specialty crop producers with the knowledge and

understanding of agritourism activities that they can incorporate into their day to day operations to increase traffic and therefore sales of specialty crops. This will all be done by providing training, marketing, and technical support services, in the areas of general business, product and enterprise development, marketing, and tourism development. Award Amount \$34,042

6. Partner with CitySeed Inc to deliver a creative, buy local marketing campaign via free space on BuyCT Grown; to give access to print media; such as recipe cards and point of sale materials that target maple syrup, nursery products, summer berries, pick-your-own apples, tree fruit, pumpkins and Christmas trees to provide an increase of resources to specialty crops producers as well as their consumers. Award Amount \$27,361.50
7. Partner with Connecticut Northeast Organic Farming Association to increase the sales and consumption of specialty crops by increasing the number, success, season length and size of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) projects in Connecticut, educating the public about the benefits of belonging to a CSA, reducing the turnover in membership by providing education and resources to understand what a CSA is and what membership means, and highlight the role community Farms' play in CSAs and in providing healthy food access. Award Amount \$48,478.66
8. Partner with Connecticut Farm Bureau Association, Inc. to enhance the competitiveness of Connecticut fruit and vegetable producers by identifying barriers to in-state distribution, facilitating interaction with institutional and retail buyers, and exploring business opportunities that can impact full-time, volume producers. Award Amount \$55,218