



IDOA now accepting Specialty Crop Grant proposals

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SPRINGFIELD— In an effort to expand the availability of fresh, locally-grown produce and strengthen the competitiveness of the state's specialty crop industry, the Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA) plans to distribute more than \$690,000 over a three-year period thanks to funding allocated in the Specialty Crop Block Grant program in the federal Farm Bill.

Grant funding applications are available on the Illinois Department of Agriculture website and must be returned to the Department by close of business on April 18th. To be eligible for funding, all projects must begin in the calendar year 2019. In the first year, IDOA will distribute roughly \$230,000, with a similar amount distributed for selected projects in 2020 and 2021.

Illinois currently devotes more than 100,000 acres of farmland to growing specialty crops, which produce nearly \$500 million in sales for Illinois farmers. To encourage further expansion of this industry, and to take full advantage of the allocated federal funds, the Department invites the development of projects pertaining to the following issues affecting the specialty crop industry:

- Enhancing food safety;
- improving compliance of the Food Safety Modernization Act,
 - o Example: Developing "Good Agricultural Practices," "Good Handling Practices," "Good Manufacturing Practices," and in cost-share arrangements for funding audits of such systems for small farmers, packers and processors;
- investing in specialty crop research, including research to focus on conservation and environmental outcomes;
- developing new and improved seed varieties and specialty crops;
- improving pest and disease control;

- increasing child and adult nutrition knowledge and consumption of specialty crops;
- improving efficiency and reducing costs of distribution systems; and
- sustainability

Projects that benefit a particular commercial product or provide a profit to a single organization, institution, or individual are ineligible. Farmers' markets, roadside stands and community-sponsored agriculture programs should consider submitting proposals to the USDA's Farmers' Market and Local Food Promotion Program.

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service defines specialty crops as "fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits and horticulture and nursery crops (including floriculture)." Illinois is the nation's leading producer of pumpkins and horseradish, while our state ranks in the top ten in acreage of cantaloupes, green peas, lima beans and sweet corn.

Request for proposal packets and additional information about the program can be found online at the Department's [website](#). Again, applications must be submitted to the Department no later than close of business on April 18th.