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Specialty Crop Grants Reward Education & New Evaluation Techniques

(Palmer, AK) – More than a quarter of a million dollars will be awarded to Alaskan projects to further food security in the state. The Alaska Division of Agriculture, through a partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), will fund projects that enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops and support growers through marketing, education, and research.

Through the USDA's Agriculture Marketing Service 2022 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, six projects in the State will receive a total of \$255,000. The Division of Agriculture will partner with the Fairbanks Soil and Water Conservation District to administer an education program for secondary school students. A demonstration farm in the Nenana-Totchaket Agricultural Project Area will train students in specialty crop farming. Other funded projects focus on research and technical assistance. The Division of Agriculture will use a portion of the funding to increase consumer awareness, purchasing, and consumption of Alaska's specialty crops via marketing programs that will extend current consumer outreach efforts and target new audiences.

"The projects awarded under the program will strongly benefit Alaska's agricultural industry," said Mia Kirk, Interim Director at the Alaska Division of Agriculture. "We're excited these grants support the development of projects in Alaska focused on education and new evaluation techniques – as well as cultivation, preservation, conservation planning, and market access."

"USDA applauds Alaska's continued commitment to supporting our nation's producers of fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, and nursery crops through the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program," said the USDA's Jenny Lester Moffitt. "The projects funded will foster innovative research and new market opportunities within the specialty crop sector, while furthering USDA's goals of creating a more fair and equitable food system and supporting local and regional producers."

The funding to Alaska is part of a total of \$72.9 million in non-competitive specialty crop funding awarded to 55 states, territories and the District of Columbia. The grants supports farmers growing specialty crops, including fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, and nursery crops. Since 2006, USDA has invested more than \$953 million through the program to fund 11,331 projects that have increased the long-term successes of producers and broadened the market for specialty crops in the U.S. and abroad.

The Department of Natural Resources' mission is to develop, conserve and maximize the use of Alaska's natural resources consistent with the public interest.

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