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Commissioner

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Department of  
Natural Resources

Anchorage, Alaska

STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release: October 2, 2023

## Specialty Crop Grants Reward Education, Research & Food Safety

**(Palmer, AK)** – Five Alaskan agricultural projects are receiving funding from the 2023 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program. The state's Division of Agriculture is awarding more than \$255,000 on behalf of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service. The grants will fund projects that enhance the competitiveness of specialty crop products and create new market opportunities for the state's specialty crop producers.

"With this year's Specialty Crop Block Grant funding, Alaska is investing in innovative projects that will help address the needs of specialty crop producers within the region," said USDA's Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs Jenny Lester Moffitt. "The funded projects will also further USDA's efforts to ensure U.S. specialty crop products remain competitive in markets across the nation and abroad."

Among the Alaska Division of Agriculture's selected projects are two youth education programs:

- The Sitka Conservation Society will receive funding to hire a specialty crop educator who will coordinate with Pacific High School on their Edible Garden Program, bring the school's new greenhouse online, conduct research, provide youth education and make specialty crops accessible via the School Lunch program.
- The Southeast Island School District's grant to perform a systematic data collection study on the highest-yielding vegetable crops for growth in an aquaponic system that will take place at Coffman Cove School greenhouse. This project will increase the availability of healthy, local produce to residences of Prince of Wales Island.

Additional funded projects focus on assisting farmers in obtaining food safety certifications as well as increasing connections, awareness and understanding between large-scale buyers and farmers by facilitating gatherings between local chefs and farmers to showcase Alaska Grown specialty crops.

"The projects awarded under the program will strongly benefit Alaska's agricultural industry," said Bryan Scoresby, Director of the Alaska Division of Agriculture. "We're excited these grants support the development of projects in Alaska focused on specialty crop education, research, economics and connecting farmers to markets."

The funding to Alaska is part of a total of \$72.9 million in non-competitive Specialty Crop Block Grant funding awarded to 54 states, territories, and the District of Columbia in fiscal year 2023. The grants support farmers growing crops including fruits, vegetables, tree nuts and nursery crops to strengthen U.S. specialty crop production and markets – ensuring an abundant and affordable supply of highly nutritious specialty crops which are vital to the health and well-being of all Americans.

*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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