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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Contact: Christin Kamm  
402-471-6856**

## **NDA, UNL RECEIVE FUNDING FROM USDA FOR SPECIALTY CROP PROJECTS**

LINCOLN – The Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA) and the University of Nebraska–Lincoln will receive nearly \$700,000 in funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to: study hops, wine grapes and dry beans; monitor invasive pests; and encourage healthy snacking in schools.

The funding comes from the USDA’s Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP), which supports the research, development and marketing of specialty crops. NDA manages the Nebraska program.

“Nebraska’s Specialty Crop Block Grant Program helps add value to the state’s agricultural industry by encouraging the growth and development of more distinctive crops,” said NDA Director Steve Wellman. “By focusing on research and production, this year’s SCBGP projects will benefit specialty crop producers across the entire state.”

Specialty crops are generally defined as fruits, vegetables, nuts, honey and some turf and ornamental crops. A full list of specialty crops is available on USDA’s website at [www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbgp/specialty-crop](http://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbgp/specialty-crop).

Fourteen new specialty crop projects are being funded this year in Nebraska.

In four projects, NDA will conduct surveys and inspections across the state for:

- walnut twig beetles to look for Thousand Cankers Disease which has not yet been detected in Nebraska;
- Potato Cyst Nematodes to maintain Nebraska’s PCN pest-free status;
- Japanese Beetles to determine what steps, if any, are necessary to certify nursery stock; and
- Columbia Root-Knot Nematodes to maintain Nebraska’s CRKN pest-free status.

The University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL) is receiving funding for three projects related to the production of hops. Research results and educational programming will provide valuable

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decision making information to producers interested in growing this popular specialty crop.

In a project advancing the growth of wine grapes in Nebraska, UNL will graft an early bud breaking grape cultivar onto a rootstock of a grape cultivar that breaks winter dormancy later in the spring season. Delaying bud break by as little as 3 to 4 days could mean the difference between a productive year and a nonproductive year. If successful, this grafting technique will have an immediate and positive impact on the grape and wine industry not only in Nebraska, but everywhere spring frost and freeze events are an issue.

In another project, NDA is partnering with UNL to research specialty crops and the potential economic consequences of herbicide drift.

UNL is also receiving funding for projects related to dry bean, chickpea and field pea growth in western Nebraska. UNL will research chickpeas, dry yellow field peas, cowpeas and pinto beans, evaluate seed treatments, and evaluate optimal row spacings to maximize yields and quality. Nebraska is third in the nation in the production of all dry edible beans.

In another project, UNL's Buy Fresh Buy Local (BFBL) Program will use grant funds to increase consumption of specialty crops by distributing specialty crops at established mobile food pantries at Lincoln schools, provide educational materials to highlight specialty crops and offer free samples of food for children to taste.

All of the projects receiving SCBGP funding this year must be completed by Sept. 29, 2021. For more information about this year's grants, go to USDA's website at [www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbgp/awards](http://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbgp/awards) and click on "FY2018 pdf."

NDA administered a two-phase competitive grant application process for SCBGP funds. Phase I involved the submission of concept proposals, which allowed applicants to explain the main points of their project. The concept proposals were independently and competitively scored by a field review panel. Projects with the highest combined scores were asked to complete Phase II of the application process and include a more in-depth description of the project.

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