

**News Release  
12-17-13**

**FARMERS TO WEIGH IN THROUGH SPECIALTY CROP GRANT ONLINE SURVEY**

West Virginia will be allocated an additional \$210,000 (pending Farm Bill approval) in Specialty Crop Block Grant funds that will be distributed during a competitive grant process beginning in January. Per USDA mandate, solicitation of program priorities is essential in developing the Request for Proposals to support the funding requests for this program.

For the first time, through an electronic survey, West Virginia farmers and consumers have the chance to weigh in on the projects that are most important to them. In addition to identifying potential project areas, the survey will provide respondents an opportunity to receive information on application and submission procedures.

West Virginia Agriculture Commissioner Walt Helmick explains, “This online survey provides a wider range of feedback for my staff as it prepares to initiate the 2014 grant process. We are looking for ideas and programs that expand the economic potential of the fruit and vegetable sector of our state. This program supports the emphasis of several other WVDA initiatives.”

In addition to fruits and vegetables, the program solicits funding proposals for value-added products, honey, maple syrup, nuts and landscape/nursery products. Ineligible products include commodity grains and meat products. Grant activities supported include research, organizational/commodity group development, educational outreach and marketing. Although individuals are not eligible to receive federal funds, agriculture groups and cooperatives are encouraged to apply.

Since 2009, the West Virginia Specialty Crop Block Grant Program has awarded more than 100 projects and \$1.1 million dollars of funds aimed at expanding the fruit and vegetable industry.

To respond to the survey, go to: <http://goo.gl/W1OVpt> or visit <http://www.wvagriculture.org> for a link. The survey will close on January 13, 2014.