

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Department Of Agriculture Announces Availability Of USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant

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ST. CROIX -- Dept. of Agriculture Commissioner Carlos Robles announced late Wednesday a grant program to fund projects that are designed to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops in the territory. According to release, the program is part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (U.S.D.A.) Agricultural Marketing Service's Specialty Crop Block Grant, which is part of the Farm Bill 2015 program.

The purpose of this program is to fund projects that can produce the highest degree of measurable benefits to Virgin Islands specialty crop producers in relation to each dollar spent, according to the release. Project proposals that benefit the following specialty crops are encouraged and will be given first preference: orchard establishment, urban

agriculture projects/ community gardens and agriculture training.

D.O.A. says it's currently seeking applications from individual farmers, non-profit organizations, corporations, businesses, commodity associations, state and local government entities, and universities. Mr. Robles encourages interested persons to take advantage of the opportunity, stating that the program could help advance the agriculture industry in the territory.

Grant funds will be prioritized towards projects that can be used as models or as pilot projects where one producer/organization is willing to show what they have done to any other interested farmer, person or organization as long as certain specific conditions are met, the release added. This may include on-site filming for the D.O.A.'s "Fresh from the Farm" television program or for Special Crop Block Grant promotional purposes.

Proposals/applications for grant funds should describe how the project potentially impacts and produces measurable outcomes for the specialty crop industry and/or the public rather than a single organization, institution, or individual. Proposals will be evaluated on the following criteria: sustainability, feasibility (consider goal, resources), matching resources, experience of applicant, thoroughness of proposal, realistic nature of budget, timely submission, and overall potential for success.

D.O.A. will accept grant applications from each applicant with a value of up to \$5,000 and a minimum of \$1,000. Application deadline is April 15, 2016.

For more information and to obtain a grant application package, please contact Errol Chichester at 340-778-0997 ext. 222, or visit D.O.A. offices on all three islands.