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# Neighbors

[The Hammonton Gazette]

## Federal grant awards \$801,000 to promote Garden State agricultural products

**SUBMITTED ARTICLE**  
 THE HAMMONTON GAZETTE

The USDA has awarded New Jersey agricultural organizations \$801,000 in Specialty Crop Block Grants to fund 14 projects to benefit Garden State crops such as fruits and vegetables, as well as horticulture and nursery.

The grants are part of the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) efforts to promote specialty crops in the nation and stimulate food and agriculturally based community economic development. Specialty crops include fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, horticulture, nursery crops and floriculture and account for more than 80 percent of the \$1.5 billion in agricultural sales annually in the Garden State.

"The Specialty Crop Block Grant program not only helps New Jersey promote our 'Jersey Fresh' program," New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture Ed Wengryn said. "We use these program dollars by supporting additional marketing activities across commodities and organizations to maximize the messaging for local healthy foods. We are pleased to continue this relationship with the USDA."

To be eligible for the grant, projects are required to "enhance the competitiveness" of specialty crops and might include, but are not limited to research, promotion, marketing, nutrition, trade enhancement, food safety, food security, plant health programs, education, "buy local" programs, increased consumption, increased innovation, improved efficiency and reduced costs of distribution systems, environmental concerns and conservation, product development and developing cooperatives.

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture will use \$390,572 of the funding to support the popular Jersey Fresh program. A majority of the projects support agricultural marketing and cooperative development. Several research projects also are included.

"We are happy to once again be partnered with New Jersey on the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program," USDA Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs Jenny Lester Moffitt said. "The innovative projects funded through this program will strengthen U.S. specialty crop production and markets and ensure Americans have sustained access to fresh, locally grown fruits, veg-

etables and other specialty crops and support the region's specialty crop growers to help ensure their long-term success."

The projects to be funded by New Jersey's grant include:

The Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station had four projects approved for funding. They include a request for a TraitFinder sensor to be housed at the P.E. Marucci Center for Blueberry and Cranberry Research, to allow for automated and precise measurements to be taken continuously on cranberry vegetative growth rates and habit, and hence the selection of material to be evaluated in field for weed competitiveness. The evaluation of this trait is economically important to the NJ cranberry industry as it has the potential for identifying and breeding for crop sustainability.

Other Rutgers Extension projects include:

- Evaluating white grub densities in blueberries planted with grass as a cover crop in crop row middles by trapping and collecting grubs to report impact on pests in blueberries and provide recommendations to growers.

- Addressing new and emerging boxwood problems (boxwood blight and boxtree moth) by developing science-based recommendations and conducting boxwood alternative crop performance trials in N.J. field settings.

- Allowing the turfgrass pathology laboratory at Rutgers University to enhance the fungicide use efficiency of N.J. turfgrass industry by developing a decision support tool which measures disease risks of dollar spot, anthracnose and brown patch diseases.

- The New Jersey Beekeepers Association (NJBA) to increase public awareness and consumption of locally produced New Jersey honey and provide beekeepers with the skills necessary to increase honey production and marketability while producing a top-quality product. The NJBA will promote local New Jersey honey with outreach and marketing strategies for both beekeepers and consumers, focusing on the honey production process and informing New Jersey residents where they can purchase honey from a local New Jersey beekeeper.

- The New Jersey Vegetable Growers Association to plan, implement and execute the annual convention that

also includes participation by other specialty crop producers for the purpose of networking, educating, providing grants for specialty crop research and disseminating Land Grant University published specialty crop production recommendations for beginner farmers, organic farmers, small farmers, large farmers and all persons interested in specialty crop production.

- The Franklin Food Bank to increase child and adult nutrition knowledge and consumption of specialty crops through the delivery of a nutrition program that will provide hands-on training and material.

Geogreens Charities, with The College of New Jersey, to conduct an innovative research endeavor aimed at significantly shortening the growth cycle of key vegetable crops to improve agricultural productivity, distribution and food security.

- Rolling Harvest Food Rescue (RHFR) to enhance awareness for produce specialty crops and encourage increased consumption and purchase by providing educational workshops featuring specialty crop identification, nutrition, preparation and growing information for low-income families at HomeFront (Mercer County), where the focus is on food security, access and sovereignty.

- The New Jersey Blueberry Growers Association to promote awareness and purchase of local Jersey Fresh Blueberries.

- The Garden State Wine Growers Association for the marketing of its Find N.J. Wines initiative.

- The New Jersey Peach Promotion Council to implement a marketing campaign shifting towards more digital marketing to gain "top of mind" awareness leading up to and during the peak Jersey peach season.

The funding to New Jersey is part of a total of \$72.9 million in non-competitive FY 2024 funding awarded to 54 states, territories, and the District of Columbia through the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program. The funding supports farmers growing specialty crops, including fruits, vegetables, tree nuts and nursery crops. The USDA's support will strengthen U.S. specialty crop production, expand markets and ensure an abundant, affordable supply of highly nutritious fruits, vegetables and other specialty crops is available to all Americans.

## K-9 helps police locate 180 wax folds during motor vehicle stop

**BY KRISTIN GUGLIETTI**  
 GAZETTE STAFF WRITER

MULLICA TWP., N.J.—Ptl. Cicalo conducted a motor vehicle stop on Aug. 18 where he was assisted by Ptl. Schwenger and his partner K-9 Grizzly. This resulted in locating 180 wax folds, heroin, crack cocaine, hypodermic needles and other paraphernalia.

During the Aug. 27 Mullica Twp. Committee meeting, Deputy Mayor DeAnna DeMarco gave a police report and statistics from July 1 to Aug. 26.

There were 2,253 calls for service, 25 were arrests, one DWI, one CDS investigation, 12 domestic violence calls, two burglaries, seven thefts, one stolen motor vehicle, 24 motor vehicle crashes, 555 motor vehicle stops and 725 motor vehicle summonses, DeMarco said.

During public comment, Kim Johnson had a question on consent agenda item 203-2024 Atlantic County Improvement Authority (ACIA) Interlocal Agreement MTRA. She wanted to know why they are moving it to the county.

"I feel that's going to be a displeasure to our residents because prior to they could come to town hall. They would have assistance. I'm just afraid when we send all of our money over there to the county those funds are going to get lost. I think it's a disservice. I'm asking that the government body reconsider that for our residents," Johnson said.

When it was time to vote on consent agenda item 203-2024 ACIA Interlocal Agreement MTRA, the majority voted 3-1 for the consent agenda item with Committee Member Glen Forman voting no.

"We are moving forward with that," Mullica Twp. Mayor Edward Hagaman said.

During the meeting, the Committee adopted several resolu-

tions including appointing Student Resource Officers (SROs) and increasing their hourly rate from \$32.50/hour to \$35/hour.

One resolution accepted the resignation of Lisa Marcolongo as Planning Board Secretary, and another resolution approved new hire and authorization appointment of Shelley Lea as Planning Board Secretary.

Other resolutions approved

include the following: Designating Depository of Funds and Authorized Signatories, Extra Duty Solutions Contract, Authorizing the Endorsement of Designation for an Alternate Deputy Registrar, Approving the Appointment of Patrolman Matthew Massino, Approving Fire Department Member Application for Volunteer Cullen Joseph Fetzer to the Weekstown

Fire Company, Approving the Technical Bid Specifications for the Reconstruction of Richards Avenue and Approving New Office of Emergency Management Plan.

After the meeting, there was an executive session where no action was made.

The next Mullica Twp. Committee meeting will be on Sept. 24 at 7 p.m. at 500 Elwood Rd.

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