

# USDA specialty crop grants awarded in Washington state

WSU projects top list

By **DON JENKINS**  
Capital Press

The USDA has awarded a total of \$4.6 million in specialty crop grants to recipients in Washington, according to the Washington State Department of Agriculture.

The USDA distributes money annually to support the fruit, vegetable and nursery industries.

The grants this year went for scientific research, promotion and to campaign for tariff reductions.

The timeline to apply for a grant in 2019 has changed from previous years. Brief proposals are due Nov. 2. WSDA reviews the proposals and asks some applicants to submit full proposals. More information is available online at [agr.wa.gov/Grants/SCBGP/](http://agr.wa.gov/Grants/SCBGP/).

Here are the 2018 grant recipients:

- Kirti Rajagopalan, Washington State University, \$249,971, to help tree fruit and grape industries adjust production methods to warmer weather.

- Walter S. Sheppard, WSU, \$249,751, to develop biological controls of Varroa mites and treatments for viruses that infect honeybees.

- Lisa DeVetter, WSU, \$249,569, to study using biodegradable plastic and non-degradable polyethylene mulches for raspberries.

- Kiwamu Tanaka, WSU, \$249,414, to develop a method to detect potato pathogens in seeds and soil or spread by insects. The project will be primarily conducted by the Molecular Plant Pathology Lab in Pullman.

- Meijun Zhu, WSU, \$249,344, to identify a non-pathogenic surrogate to predict how a pathogenic bacteria will react during the processing of apples. The knowledge gained will be distributed to apple packers.

- Lisa Neven, USDA Agricultural Research Service, \$243,449, to work with the Washington State Department of Agriculture to protect tree fruit from insects in solid waste from British Columbia brought to landfills in Washington.

- Girish Ganjyal, WSU, \$243,247, to increase the market for dry peas, particularly in protein products.

- The Center for Produce Safety, \$228,260, to study the survival of the bacteria *Listeria monocytogenes* on apples in storage. The project will be in partnership with Michigan State University.

- Hanu Pappu of WSU, \$216,351, to study controlling the spread of Iris yellow spot virus to onions by onion thrips, an insect.

- Rodney Cooper, USDA Agricultural Research Service, \$215,538, to study which plants disperse potato



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Washington State University researchers will use a \$249,751 grant from the USDA to study controlling Varroa mites and viruses that harm honeybees. The grant is one of 25 Specialty Crop Block Grants awarded to applicants in Washington.

psyllids into potato fields. Psyllids carry zebra chip disease. USDA researchers in Wapato, Wash., will lead the project. Washington State University, Oregon State University and University of Idaho researchers will participate.

- Tobin Peever, WSU, \$207,709, to study controlling Botrytis gray mold, a disease that threatens berries. The disease has widespread resistance to some fungicides used in Washington berry production.

- Washington Blueberry Commission, \$205,500, to campaign for tariff reduction in India. The project will include a study to promote the benefit to India's economy, traveling to India to rally support and petitioning the government.

- Manoj Karkee, WSU, \$195,232, to develop mechanical thinning of vineyards to reduce the demand for labor.

- Faith Critzer, WSU, \$194,017, to evaluate ways to treat irrigation water to comply with the Produce Safety Rule.

- Lisa DeVetter, WSU, \$178,328, for research on mechanically harvesting blueberries for the fresh market to reduce the demand for labor. WSU and Oregon State University jointly submitted the proposal.

- Theresa Pitts-Singer, USDA Agricultural Research Service, \$153,893, to study using the blue orchard bee as an alternative to honeybees to pollinate pears and cherries. The USDA ARS Pollinating Insects Research Unit in Logan, Utah, and the WSU research center in Prosser will collaborate.

- Bernardita Sallato-Carmona, WSU, \$152,937, to promote early root growth in apples and cherries to increase the absorption of calcium. Calcium deficiency harms the quality of fruit.

- Sustainable Connections, \$151,273, to help farmers in Skagit and Whatcom counties sell produce to wholesale buyers.



E.J. Harris/EO Media Group File

Since the end of the supercycle in 2012, farmers have had to deal with slimmer margins.

## Producers need to prepare for next economic cycle

By **CAROL RYAN DUMAS**  
Capital Press

U.S. agriculture has been playing defense since the super cycle of economic wealth ended in 2012.

From 2006 to 2012, everything was robust and everyone was making money, David Kohl, an economics professor at Virginia Polytechnic Institute, said in a webinar hosted by Northwest Farm Credit Services last week.

Ethanol was booming, the value of the dollar was low and 300 million people worldwide were moving up to the middle class every year for four or five years, he said.

"That all stopped in 2012," he said.

Since then, farmers have been dealing with surplus commodities that have depressed margins and hurt cash flow and profits. The tough times have caused them to burn through equity or refinance for liquidity, he said.

To size up the economic environment, Kohl referenced an agricultural lender who said 93 percent of his customers were

profitable with high margins during the supercycle. Today, only 63 percent of his customers are profitable and with only razor-thin margins.

What is emerging is a widening gap of economic performance in the farm sector, with a certain group of producers doing fairly well and another group having cash flow and profit issues, he said.

"I think you're going to see an agricultural economy with a smaller pie, but a certain group of producers are going to get a bigger portion of the pie," he said.

The next cycle in the agricultural economy will be a regeneration and will begin early in the next decade. Producers will want to keep their eye on transition management. They're going to have to take their experience, equity and tenure and mesh it with youth, management and growth to take the business to the next level, he said.

"I will contend that transition management over the next few years will be one of the top three things that you're going to have to look at and examine in management and credit risk," he said.

Another important component is that agriculture will be driven by consumers and data, and one size enterprise is not going to fit all demands, he said.

For sustained success, he advised producers to monitor their cash flow on a quarterly or monthly basis because things can get out of hand quickly. He also recommended they identify their top five costs and cut what they can without hindering production. He also advised them to form an advisory team.

Progressive businesses and managers will not only know but have written down their cost of production by enterprise; business, family and personal goals; projected cash flow; a sensitivity analysis; and financial ratios and break-evens, he said.

They should also have executed a written marketing plan, risk-management plan, improvement plan and transition plan, operate with an accrual record-keeping system and work with an advisory team.

They also need a proactive attitude and modest lifestyle habits that incorporate a family living budget.

## Volunteers whip demo vineyard back into welcoming shape

By **BRAD CARLSON**  
Capital Press

That demonstration vineyard in the heart of downtown Caldwell, Idaho, isn't really new.

It just looks that way after volunteer wine enthusiasts on Sept. 19 showed up for their fifth and final weekly session of pruning, raking and hauling.

The group apparently met its first of two goals: restoring the eight-row, seven-varietal vineyard's capability to help welcome visitors to the nearby wine country. Next, volunteers plan to convene in February to give the vineyard a sleek, winemaker-ready look, though it's not designed for commercial purposes.

Treasure Valley Community College viticulture and enology students in 2009 established the vineyard. Student volunteers maintained it for a time after lackluster enrollment factored into the program's end. TVCC offers several agriculture programs.

Meanwhile, downtown Caldwell was in the midst of revitalization, among other things uncovering and cleaning up Indian Creek to anchor



Brad Carlson/Capital Press  
Kathy Dillon prunes Chardonnay vines Sept. 19 as part of a group effort to improve a nine-year-old demonstration vineyard in downtown Caldwell, Idaho.

streetscape and parkland improvements that would draw more visitors. The demonstration vineyard became a kind of welcome mat to the nearby wine country. Eventually it sat

mostly unattended, growing foliage and losing grapes to passing birds and people.

"What we've had to do is get it to a level that it is presentable and that looks respectable to the brand promise we made to this community," said Gregg Alger, who owns Huston Vineyards.

Cane pruning the vines into shorter and more uniform profile, properly positioning them on wires, training them to grow in the right direction and some more root-area cleanup will be on tap in the vineyard in February.

Alger said it's looking good for now, having missed a couple of pruning cycles, and can again be part of advocates' efforts to make downtown Caldwell a key gathering place in connection with the Sunnyslope Wine Trail portion of the Snake River American Viticultural area.

"It is a nice representation of our many wines we have to offer in the local Sunnyslope wine region," said Lisa Ga-

biola-Weitz, one of the eight volunteers.

"Something needed to be done," said local accountant Mike Hensel. He and some of the other volunteers said they experienced health challenges recently and were happy to help out, get outside and relax.

He and Mike Pollard, a Caldwell City Council member, came up with the idea, Pollard said.

The vineyard exists in part "to feature Caldwell as the gateway to the wine industry," said Pollard, who circulated the volunteer cleanup idea on social media.

"We're just a bunch of volunteers," he said.

Each participant brought his or her own equipment, and the city, which owns the property, each week loaned a dump truck, Pollard said.

The vineyard grows Riesling, Viognier, Chardonnay, Pinot gris, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah and Malbec wine grapes.

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