



Washington
State Department of
Agriculture

SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT AWARDS 2026

*In 2026, the Washington State Department of Agriculture
received approximately \$4.7 million to fund 21 projects:*

Grant Recipient: Northwest Cider Association

Project Title: Expanding Culinary Integration and Media Attention to Drive Sales of Washington Cider

Award: \$249,388

Abstract: The Northwest Cider Association out of Mt Vernon, WA is launching a regional marketing initiative to elevate Washington-grown cider and Washington apples through expanded culinary partnerships, media outreach, and event activations. The project will increase consumer awareness, access, and demand for Washington cider by expanding the cider ecosystem into chef-driven recipes, hosting educational tastings in media hubs, and expanding cider-focused trade events. These efforts aim to strengthen market competitiveness for Washington cideries and support the state's specialty crop growers of apples, pears, grapes, cane berries, stone fruit, cranberries, hops and botanical herbs.

Grant Recipient: Pacific Northwest Canned Pear Service

Project Title: Increase Demand for Pacific Northwest Pears Among K-12 Schools

Award: \$169,911

Abstract: The Pacific Northwest Canned Pear Service (PNCPS) will partner with Culinary Nutrition Associates LLC and Culinary Solutions Centers LLC, organizations led by K-12 school-focused dietitians and chefs, to execute marketing and communication activities designed to provide K-12 schools with usage ideas, nutrition attributes, and education information about Pacific Northwest grown canned pears. The goal of these activities will be to increase demand for Washington-grown canned pears from one of the canned pear industry's largest customer segments, K-12 schools. For Washington growers of cannery pears to remain financially stable, customer demand must remain strong. Pacific Northwest Canned Pear Service, managed by the Washington State Fruit Commission, Yakima, Washington. Culinary Nutrition Associates, LLC, Akron, Ohio
Culinary Solutions Centers, LLC, Zebulon, GA

Grant Recipient: Washington State Wine Commission

Project Title: Drive Sales and Increase Distribution of WA Wines through Educational Inbound Immersion Program for U.S. Wine Buyers

Award: \$248,390

Abstract: The Washington State Wine Commission (WSWC), based in Seattle, WA, will establish an agreement with the WSDA to host approximately 66 influential U.S. restaurant and retail wine buying professionals across two immersive educational trips designed to increase domestic sales. To open and expand market access with this program, the targeted guests will be wine buyers, wholesale distributors, retailers, educators, and others who hold significant influence over consumer purchase behavior. Research shows that 80% of wine sales are the result of recommendations from a trusted source such as this audience. This program will equip buyers with the tools to sell more Washington wines in their home markets as well as creating direct relationships between buyers and specialty

crop producers.

Grant Recipient: Organic Seed Alliance

Project Title: Expanding Novelty-Colored Carrot Seed Production in Washington State

Award: \$206,895.24

Abstract: Consumer demand for novelty-colored carrots (purple, yellow, red, and multicolored) is growing in both fresh and processed markets. However, organic and open-pollinated (OP) seed sources for these varieties are limited, leaving farmers reliant on imported or hybrid seed that is not adapted to Washington's conditions. Organic Seed Alliance located in Port Townsend, WA will conduct on farm seed production research, provide technical training and resources, in collaboration with the Culinary Breeding Network, to support producers in growing and marketing economically viable, regionally adapted novelty carrot seed.

Grant Recipient: Grow Food DBA Viva Farms

Project Title: Scaling for Success: Supporting Specialty Crop Producers through Market Development to Build Viable Farm Businesses

Award: \$249,452.53

Abstract: Grow Food dba Viva Farms will expand market access and improve post-harvest efficiency for Washington's specialty crop producers through training, shared infrastructure, and targeted regional market development. The project will help farmers extend their growing seasons, access premium wholesale and institutional markets, achieve food safety certification and increase sales. These efforts will strengthen the competitiveness and resilience of Washington's regional specialty crop industry. Specifically, the project will operate in both Mount Vernon and Woodinville, WA

Grant Recipient: Agroforestry Northwest

Project Title: Shade-Grown Gold – crop, product, and market development of PNW forest-farmed specialty tea.

Award: \$212,218.53

Abstract: Agroforestry Northwest (AFNW) - Bothell WA, is establishing a sustainable local supply chain for high-value, shade-grown tea by integrating forest farming practices into Washington's specialty crop industry. Responding to a steadily growing interest among local farmers in shade-grown cultivation, AFNW will lead this initiative to transform tea into a profitable regional specialty. In collaboration with WSU Extension and local producers, the project builds on established forest farmed tea trials - six sites already planted around the Puget Sound - to meet surging global demand for premium green teas while utilizing Washington's unique microclimates. Key activities include identifying and propagating cold-hardy *Camellia sinensis* varieties, refining specialized processing techniques for Page 2 of 14 high-value products like matcha, and developing local marketing protocols. These tasks will yield several key deliverables: a Forest Farmed Tea market incubation model, demonstration plantings around the region for farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchange, a line of unique Pacific Northwest (PNW) tea products, and a comprehensive PNW Tea Producer Guide. The expected outcomes include increased farm resilience through diversified income streams and the promotion of environmental stewardship via climate-smart agriculture. By leveraging underutilized forestland, this project offers a high-margin opportunity for small and mid-sized farms to enter an expanding global market. This work directly supports WSDA funding priorities by strengthening

regional supply chains and providing a sustainable template for future specialty crop growth in Washington State.

Grant Recipient: WSU – Maria Hernandez

Project Title: Preservation Pathways: Connecting Consumers to WA Specialty Crops

Award: \$204,734

Abstract: Washington State University Food Systems Program out of Burlington, Washington will lead Preservation Pathways: Connecting Consumers to WA Specialty Crops, a statewide initiative to increase consumer demand for Washington-grown specialty crops by promoting seasonal purchasing and increase year-round consumption of WA grown specialty crops through home food preservation strategies. Through partnerships with producers, tribes, and food recovery organizations, the project will create and distribute educational materials and expand access to preservation tools, helping consumers store and enjoy local fruits and vegetables year-round. This project also supports small and mid-scale farms by developing educational resources for preservation methods that producers can share directly with their customers during harvest season to boost sales and improve farm economic viability. Management for this project will be based out of Burlington, WA but activities will be conducted statewide.

Grant Recipient: WSU – Landon Charlo

Project Title: Native American Specialty Crop Farm and Food Business Training and Certification Program

Award: \$246,393

Abstract: Washington State University Extension, located in Pullman Washington, will partner with Yakama Nation Farms, Long Hearing Farm, and other food business leaders to increase the number of successful Native-owned food and farm businesses in Washington by developing and offering a culturally informed food entrepreneurship program.

Grant Recipient: Kulshan Carbon Trust

Project Title: Biochar for Soil Health and Market Innovation in Washington's Specialty Crop Industry

Award: \$212,736.32

Abstract: Kulshan Carbon Trust (KCT), in partnership with Rodale Institute's Pacific Northwest Organic Center, Skagit Soils, and Bow Hill Blueberries, will conduct replicated field trials in Rockport, Washington, to evaluate compost-inoculated biochar applied at planting as a soil amendment for organic blueberry establishment. Field trials will be implemented and managed at Rodale Institute's long-term research site, allowing for consistent management, statistically valid comparisons, and continued use beyond the grant period for research and demonstration.

In parallel, the project will pilot a grower-centered eco-credit concept that links verified improvements in soil health—such as soil carbon, water retention, and biological activity—to transparent, data-backed environmental claims that remain with the farm and crop. This pilot does not involve the sale or transfer of carbon offsets. Through applied research, field demonstrations, and targeted training and education, the project will provide Washington specialty crop growers with practical, scalable strategies to improve soil health, strengthen blueberry establishment, and enhance long-term farm resilience.

Grant Recipient: WSU – Michelle Moyer

Project Title: Managing Grapevine Chlorosis and Sour Rot Through Plant Nutrition

Award: \$239,046

Abstract: Washington State University in Prosser, Washington, will develop tools for Washington grape growers to reduce the occurrence and severity Concord iron-induced chlorosis and wine grape sour rot in vineyards. This will be done through tailored plant nutrient programs and other soil remediation approaches, designed to unlock existing nutrients, or alleviate potential deficiencies that reduce fruit integrity. The results of these trials will be shared with Washington grape growers through Extension newsletters, field days, and grower meetings.

Grant Recipient: WSU - Harper

Project Title: Are wild *Vaccinium* and close relatives in the PNW a reservoir for disease?

Award: \$72,217.46

Abstract: Washington State University researchers based in Prosser, Washington, will determine whether blueberry-infecting viruses and phytoplasmas are present in ornamental and wild plants in the family Ericaceae (which includes blueberry and cranberry) in Washington state and identify whether there is evidence of spillover into cultivated commercial plantings. These pathogens are known to cause loss of vigor and yield, and management relies of plant removal and vector sprays, both of which impose significant costs to growers, particularly when they do not know which exact pathogens are being transmitted in their area. Informed, cost-effective management requires knowing where the pathogens are coming from, which this study will identify through field surveys, diagnostics, and fingerprinting of pathogens, combining this with vector and plant phenological data to predict risk.

Grant Recipient: USDA-ARS – Gina Angelella

Project Title: Combining entomopathogenic fungi and insecticides for the management of aphids and aphid-vectored virus in potato

Award: \$249,450

Abstract: USDA-ARS researchers at the Temperate Tree Fruit and Vegetable Research Unit in Wapato, WA, collaborating with research and extension faculty at Oregon State University in Hermiston, OR will explore novel IPM approaches targeting aphids and aphid-vectored viruses in potatoes. Specifically, they will test combinations of fungal biopesticides and insecticides for efficacy and will identify promising targets for the development of gene suppression technology. This research will help address the current lack of neonicotinoid alternatives in potato pest management.

Grant Recipient: WSU – Tiana Dupont

Project Title: Codling Moth Emergency Response

Award: \$240,175

Abstract: Washington State University, Wenatchee, Washington, in collaboration with the Okanogan County Pest Board are working to maintain economic viability of Okanogan County orchards by reducing codling moth pressure, a growing threat to orchards in the region, which became critical in late summer 2025. This project will provide cost share for removal of orchard blocks with high codling moth levels which are threatening neighboring orchards. We will minimize outside sources of codling moth through backyard apple and pear tree owner education and best practice demonstration as well as personnel for regrowth/wild tree scouting and removal response. Increased producer knowledge and adoption of codling moth best management practices are designed to reduce the risk of future outbreaks.

Grant Recipient: WSU – Rui Liu

Project Title: Evaluating Non-chemical Weed Management Strategies for Washington State Tree Fruit Production

Award: \$249,423

Abstract: In this project, Washington State University will collaborate with the Washington State Department of Agriculture to assess non-chemical weed management approaches in tree fruit production. In fruit crops, there are limited herbicide options, and in some cases, weed populations have developed herbicide resistance. This is exacerbated by growing environmental safety concerns, and exploring alternative weed management strategies is essential. This project aims to evaluate technologies, including electrical weed control, mowing, cultivation, and mulch, alone and in combination. These methods have been studied in other regions of the U.S. but not yet evaluated in WA state. This project will focus on 1) assessing the effectiveness of non-chemical weed control technologies in WA orchards; 2) analyzing the influence of these non-chemical practices on soil health attributes and their compatibility with current management systems; and 3) developing educational resources and providing growers with training to adopt alternative weed management practices. Field trials will be conducted on farms near Prosser, Wenatchee and Pasco, in Washington State, to evaluate the efficacy of non-chemical weed management technologies, collect and analyze data on soil health and other agronomic factors related to the implementation of these practices, and develop educational materials and hold workshops and webinars to share findings and recommendations. Project outcomes will provide comprehensive data on the efficacy and practicality of non-chemical weed management technologies and help offer recommendations on best practices, ultimately increasing growers' adoption. Overall, the project will empower tree fruit growers with viable, sustainable alternatives to chemical weed management, addressing both economic and environmental concerns.

Grant Recipient: WSU – Tim Waters

Project Title: Enhancing onion microbiological safety with gaseous ozone

Award: \$249,450

Abstract: Washington State University, Pasco, WA, will partner with the Washington State Department of Agriculture to evaluate gaseous ozone for enhancing onion microbiological safety. Onions are a high-value specialty crop in Washington State, with annual production exceeding 21 million hundredweight and a farmgate value of ~\$477 million. Despite their economic importance, the industry faces rising food safety risks. Outbreaks of Salmonella and Shiga toxin-producing E. coli (STEC) linked to bulbs and diced onions have caused thousands of illnesses and substantial economic losses. Current onion packing practices, which prioritize dry handling and minimal water use, preserve bulb quality but limit opportunities for cleaning and sanitization, posing substantial safety concerns. Consequently, industry has an urgent need for effective antimicrobial interventions. Ozone, with broad-spectrum antimicrobial activity, has shown promise in prior studies for pathogen reduction on other produce. The overall goal is to enhance the microbiological safety and quality of Washington onions by validating a suitable surrogate organism and evaluating gaseous ozone as an effective postharvest intervention for controlling foodborne pathogens and decay during extended storage, thereby improving both microbial safety and shelf-life performance. The specific objectives are to 1) Assess the survival and persistence of Salmonella and STEC on onions under simulated postharvest storage conditions and validate a suitable nonpathogenic surrogate. 2) Evaluate the efficacy of low-dose continuous gaseous ozone in controlling foodborne pathogens and decay organisms on onions during extended commercial storage. This project will generate critical data on pathogen persistence in onions and develop a science-based antimicrobial solution for the onion industry. Outcomes will support regulatory compliance and enhance both microbiological safety and economic resilience of Washington's onion industry.

Grant Recipient: Center for Produce Safety – Meijun Zhu

Project Title: Safe cooling, safer fruit: optimizing hydrocooling water management to minimize pathogen risk in stone fruits

Award: \$249,450

Abstract: The Center for Produce Safety will partner with Washington State University to reduce contamination risks for stone fruits in chlorinated hydrocooling systems by optimizing operational parameters for chlorine stability and pathogen control and then validating the optimized chlorine management strategies in commercial stone-fruit hydrocooling facilities. PI, Meijun Zhu, with Washington State University is based out of Pullman, Washington.

Grant Recipient: WSU – Lisa DeVetter

Project Title: Too Hot to Handle: Effects of Thermal Stress on Floral Resources and Pollination in Blueberry

Award: \$245,150

Abstract: This project, led by Washington State University with USDA-ARS and Utah State University as co-investigators, aims to generate new knowledge to inform heat-mitigation strategies for blueberry growers facing increasingly frequent and intense heat waves during spring floral bud development through bloom. By identifying and characterizing the impacts of heat damage on both plants and honeybee pollinators, this project will support the development of management practices to safeguard pollination and ensure future yields. Specific project objectives include: 1) Determine the effects of heat on blueberry pollen and nectar quantity and nutritional profile; 2) Evaluate overhead cooling effects on flower temperature, honeybee activity, pollination outcomes, and fruit quality; and 3) Extend project findings to growers and beekeepers through targeted outreach. PI Lisa DeVetter with Washington State University is based out of Mount Vernon, Washington.

Grant Recipient: WSU – Kate Evans

Project Title: Orchard systems for WA 64 apple

Award: \$248,557

Abstract: A Washington State University research and extension team in Wenatchee and Prosser, WA, proposes to further define orchard recommendations and provide technical support for Washington growers as the new apple variety WA 64 moves into commercial production. Established research and demonstration orchards have been used to determine initial recommendations regarding rootstocks and orchard systems that were communicated to nurseries in August 2024 and to the broader grower community in April 2025.

As the orchards mature and produce fruit, further recommendations for grower practice and demonstration are required. Based on grower feedback, a small add-on planting with different rootstocks and production systems was established in 2025, with others planned for 2026 and 2027, which will provide a valuable resource for informing and demonstrating to growers how to best establish and manage their new orchards.

Grant Recipient: WSU – Matthew Whiting

Project Title: Smart Cherry Orchard Testbed for Testing and Demonstrating Emerging Technologies

Award: \$211,077

Abstract: This project led by a Washington State University research and extension team proposes to establish a sweet cherry "Smart Orchard" testbed to evaluate and demonstrate emerging technologies in collaboration with stakeholders. In this orchard testbed we will: 1) conduct applied research to generate unbiased data on the performance and reliability of new production technologies (e.g., irrigation automation, sensors for canopy stress assessment), and 2) host demonstrations and field days that bring together stakeholders and technology providers. This testbed will be established in a commercial orchard near Benton City, WA. Put simply, our project will help growers determine whether new technologies will provide a return on investment for their orchard.

Grant Recipient: WSU – Galinato & Miles

Project Title: Maximizing farm profitability through integrated orchard practices and mechanical harvest in Washington cider apple production

Award: \$249,402

Abstract: The limited supply and strong demand for cider apples in the U.S. present an opportunity for Washington cider apple growers in an expanding cider market. To remain profitable and competitive, growers must adopt innovative, integrated orchard management strategies that stabilize annual yields while reducing overall production costs. This project emphasizes orchard production systems in which horticultural practices and mechanization are jointly planned and implemented. The Washington State University project team will evaluate the effectiveness of targeted horticultural practices to reduce pre-harvest fruit drop and assess the economic costs and benefits of integrated orchard management practices that incorporate mechanization as a core component. Project outcomes will increase grower knowledge and decision-making capacity related to orchard system integration, supporting improved yield stability and long-term orchard profitability. Project outputs, including Extension publications and presentations, will disseminate research-based findings to Washington cider apple producers. The project will be conducted through coordinated activities in Mount Vernon, WA where field studies will be implemented, and Pullman, WA, where economic analysis will be done using production, management and cost data generated from the field studies.

Grant Recipient: WSU – Mark Keller

Project Title: Mitigating heat stress to improve uniformity of wine grape ripening

Award: \$249,427

Abstract: Washington State University (Pullman, WA) will introduce the use of natural plant growth regulators (PGRs) as an alternative to irrigation-based evaporative cooling for reducing heat-induced variability in grape berry ripening and disseminate results to stakeholders through grower meetings and publications. Observations in vineyards of southeastern Washington in recent years have found that grape ripening is often delayed on the west side of the canopy following heatwave events in the summer, which introduce unwanted variability in fruit composition at harvest and may substantially increase harvest costs by necessitating staggered harvesting for premium quality products. Field trials will be conducted at the Irrigated Agriculture Research and Extension Center (Prosser, WA) to determine whether targeted and timely PGR (abscisic acid and auxin) applications can re-synchronize ripening after heatwave events and improve uniformity of berry composition at harvest. The research outcomes will provide a practical solution for Washington's grape growers to mitigate adverse effects of heatwaves during the growing season without increasing the use of valuable irrigation water or compromising deficit-irrigation goals.