

Virginia

The Honorable J. Carlton Courter III

Commissioner
Virginia Dept of Agriculture &
Consumer Services
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Base Grant: \$500,000
Specialty Crop Grant: \$620,000
Total Grant: \$1,120,000



"Virginia Grown"

Specialty Crop Promotion:

Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS), \$511,500.

Goal of this activity was to increase awareness and demand for "Virginia Grown" specialty crops. This includes fresh fruits and vegetables, nursery products, Christmas trees, wine, seafood and other specialty crops in Virginia. Staff first talked with key grocery retailers to survey their needs and identify better ways to promote "Virginia Grown" in their stores. Next, a multifaceted campaign was created to achieve the objectives. Major elements of this campaign included a new video for buyers; new Point-Of Sale (POS) materials; radio and television advertising; consumer public relations; co-op advertising for retailers and producers, and an updated display contest. Public relations ran throughout the year. Our publicity program included articles with recipes using Virginia Grown products and stories about other specialty crops like "Planting nursery products in the fall." New television and radio commercials kicked-off our July "Virginia Grown" promotion. New photography and video footage were taken throughout the growing season. Existing POS materials and premiums were tripled to meet demand. New POS included stickers, pallet wraps, balloons, and produce bags. This activity will extend into 2004.

Meet Your Customers Missions:

Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, \$153,500.

Four missions were organized for Virginia produce and nursery industry leaders to visit major U.S. grocery store and wholesale buyers, warehouse operations, and retail stores throughout the United States. Purpose of the trips was to talk with individuals at the store, warehouse, and corporate levels to determine/review consumer demands, competition, packaging requirements, and potential sales opportunities. The trips gave buyers and corporate personnel an opportunity to meet with Virginia producers and enhance working

relationships. To complete the missions to meet the buyers, block grant funds were also utilized to expand production area tours for produce and nursery buyers, as well as grocery produce managers that had not visited with Virginia growers.

"Savor Virginia" Promotion:

Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, \$140,000.

A series of integrated, multi-commodity food promotion events were staged for consumer and wholesale buyer audiences, and media outlets in Washington, DC, and Richmond, VA. These events featured a wide variety of Virginia specialty food products to including produce, seafood, meats, wine, eggs and dairy items available in the state. The promotion utilized Virginia chefs demonstrating the unique cuisine to be found within the state and the wide variety of foods and food products that come from Virginia and how they can be incorporated into menus for patrons or for a family. Tie-ins with local retail stores and restaurants were also implemented. A scaled-down version of this promotion was continued in 2003, focusing on expanding relationships between producers and restaurateurs.

Phyto-Sanitary Access for Apples into Mexico:

Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, \$150,000.

An official protocol was researched and established with Mexican and U.S. phyto-sanitary authorities to secure access for Virginia apples into Mexico. In the past only three U.S. states (Washington, Idaho and Oregon) enjoyed Mexican phyto-sanitary approval to ship apples. An inspection protocol and logistical arrangements were established that enabled Mexican phyto-sanitary inspectors to travel to Virginia during apple harvest and certify the procedures used by Virginia shippers to comply with Mexican phyto-sanitary requirements. With

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**PHYTO-SANITARY
ACCESS FOR
APPLES INTO
MEXICO**

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the door firmly open for sales of Virginia apples into Mexico, Virginia producers sent monthly shipments to Mexico during harvest season and throughout the winter.

Latin American Export Promotion:

Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, \$65,000.

VDACS led a producer mission to Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean basin to expand markets for Virginia produce and bulk commodities. Sales of apples, wood products, dairy genetics and high protein soybean meal valued at over \$5.5 million were completed in 2003. Follow-up sales of equal value are on the books for 2004.

Specialty Crops Trade Shows:

Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, \$50,000.

The objective for this activity was to expand Virginia presence at a wider variety of specialty crop trade shows, and expand produce involvement with these trade shows. VDACS designed and built a totally new exhibit for the Produce Marketing Association tradeshow, participated in the PANTS Nursery show and the Natural Products East organic trade show. Previously Virginia producers had no/minimal presence at these crucial industry shows.

Quality Improvement Workshops:

Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, \$50,000.

Fruit and Vegetable personnel assisted fruit & vegetable producers throughout the state (including organic producers), especially the southwest portion of the State, by providing technical assistance in the form of grower workshops. These workshops, targeted mainly for smaller size small growers, focused on harvesting, grading and packing their specific commodities to meet contract specifications and expectations of chain stores, wholesalers and other buyers. Ensuring a consistent supply of consistent quality produce is the key to retaining and expanding sales to wholesale buyers and produce brokers. Commodity grading services in Virginia is strictly a fee-for-services function, and training workshops of this magnitude would normally have to be paid for by the producer. Grant funding allowed this training to be provided to new-to-market growers at no cost.

Assistance to Virginia Horticultural and Nursery Products Industry:

Virginia Horticultural Council, \$25,000.

A grant was awarded to the Virginia Horticultural Council to allow them to enhance efforts to develop a promotional campaign that clearly identifies Virginia horticultural, nursery, landscape, and floral products under one brand identity. Following along the idea of the "Got Milk" campaign, a brand identity will focus consumer attention that high quality horticultural products are available in Virginia and helps point consumers toward Virginia producers of these products.

**Improving Timeliness and Efficiency
Market News Distribution:**

Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, \$30,000.

Market News reports are generated nationwide throughout the workday. No mechanism existed to automatically send the time-sensitive price information to customers by e-mail as soon as the reports are created. Grant funds were utilized to install state-of-the-art software to automate distribution of Market News reports. Market News can now distribute all national and state reports to subscribers instantaneous to substantially improve the timeliness of their market intelligence.