



WSU Today Online

## Current Article List

WSU News

### Specialty crops

#### Researchers receive \$3.3 million in grants

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PULLMAN – Researchers at WSU were among the most successful nationwide in winning competitive grants through the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s new Specialty Crop Research Initiative.

This new program targets research funding to “specialty crops,” which include fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture and nursery crops. Designated research funds had not previously been available for these crops, unlike the long-established programs for commodity crops such as wheat, corn and soybeans.

WSU scientists will receive more than \$3.3 million to study a variety of things, including how plant nutrients affect white wine quality, new ways of thinning tree fruit, integrated pest management systems that allow farmers to use fewer pesticides, and the development of new fabric-based, degradable mulches for use as crop cover. Altogether, WSU researchers received nearly 12 percent of the funding available in this \$28 million program.

“The success of WSU researchers this first year of the Specialty Crop Grant program is strong testimony to the quality and innovation of their work,” said **Ralph Cavalieri**, associate dean and director of WSU’s Agricultural Research Center. “This indicates that they are not only on the cutting edge of what their disciplines can deliver, but most importantly, they are connected with the specialty crop industry and know what the priority needs are.

“In a state as agriculturally diverse as Washington,” he added, “this kind of targeted grant program is exactly what is needed to ensure specialty crop growers have the same scientific research support as other agricultural producers.”

Cavalieri noted that “Sens. Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell as well as Reps. Rick Larsen, Doc Hastings, Cathy McMorris-Rodgers and Norm Dicks worked very hard with the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance to make this program happen.”

#### **Specifically, the grants will fund the following WSU projects:**

- Entomologist Vince Jones and a team comprised of Tree Fruit Research and Extension Center Director Jay Brunner, Extension Specialist Elizabeth Beers, economist Karina Gallardo and sociologist Jessica Goldberger will receive \$2.24 million to enhance biological controls to stabilize western orchard integrated pest management systems;
- Plant pathologist Debra Inglis along with fabric scientist Karen Leonas and Horticulture’s Carol Miles will receive nearly \$99,000 to develop degradable mulches for use as specialty crop covers;

- Professor Joan Davenport, food scientist Kerry Ringer and Viticulture Extension Specialist Mercy Olmstead will receive \$79,500 to study how to optimize white wine quality through managing plant nutrients;
- Extension educator Gwen Hoheisel, along with Vince Jones and Extension Educator Karen Lewis will receive \$621,670 as part of a \$6 million grant awarded to Carnegie Mellon University to look at comprehensive automation for specialty crops;
- Plant pathologist Hanu Pappu will receive \$149,400 as part of a \$1 million grant given to the University of Wisconsin to study the genetic and genomic tools for managing thrips and iris yellow spot virus in onions; and
- Biological Systems Engineering's Marvin Pitts and Karen Lewis will receive \$133,804 as part of a \$1 million grant given to Penn State University to develop innovative technologies for thinning fruit.