

Land-grant expertise make specialty crops viable

Specialty crops range from fruits and vegetables to cut flowers. These plants are cultivated for food, medicine or pleasure. Specialty crops face the same pressures as traditional row crops. Land-grant university research and outreach address these issues, making specialty crops a viable, profitable market.

Successful examples include:

- Each year **Georgia** apple growers contend with tremendous pest and disease pressures to raise a successful crop. Georgia Extension agents partnered with the Southeastern Apple Research Extension Specialists at North Carolina State and University of Georgia precision ag researchers to get funding for three weather stations. Using these stations and precision agriculture tools, apple growers can save thousands of dollars annually by cutting spray costs and reducing crop loss.
- The peach industry is an important fruit crop industry in **Alabama**. Two major threats affect the state's peach crop, fungus and climate change (dormancy). Alabama Extension experts are developing and evaluating new peach varieties and rootstocks that are resistant to fungus and reduce dormancy caused by low temperatures.
- Pecan trees are highly valued for their delicious and nutritious nutmeats. **New Mexico** State researchers are identifying bacterial and fungal families that can be incorporated into the microbiomes of pecan trees to ensure the future success of trees thriving under less than favorable conditions.
- Spelt, a flour alternative to wheat flour, has increased in popularity over the past decade, due in part to the organic and local food movement and increased demand for wheat-free products. University of **Vermont** researchers are evaluating winter Spelt varieties to determine the best varieties, management practices, harvesting and hulling methods to grow Spelt in Vermont. Growing specialty grains, such a Spelt, can help farmers diversify and expand into new markets.

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