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## Fiscal Year 2024 Description of Funded Projects

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**Number of Grants Awarded:** 4  
**Amount of Funds Awarded:** \$921,379.00

For more information, please visit the grant program's website:  
<https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/fsmip>

**NOTE:** The below project descriptions were provided by the grant recipients.

### Alabama

**Recipient:** Auburn University  
**Project Type:** Economic Research  
**Award Amount:** \$240,000.00

#### *Marketing Options for Producers and Agribusiness in the Southeast: Social-Affinity Labels and Distant Markets*

The Southern Black Belt region disproportionately has lower-income agricultural producers and agribusinesses. The region also has a larger share of historically underserved minority farmers and rural communities. Moreover, some Black Belt farms have heirs' property, a form of shared ownership that comes with legal challenges and land loss risks. By estimating the value consumers place on products from these farms, the project explores innovative marketing strategies and channels. Specifically, it examines consumer interest in paying more for food labeled with origin information (Southern, Alabama, or unspecified) and three social affinity farm attributes: Black Belt, minority-owned, and heirs' property. A representative internet-based survey in two distinct regions uses a choice experiment to measure consumer willingness to pay (WTP) for food products with the origin and attribute combinations. Key research questions compare premiums and market size across regions, anticipating that distant markets in the Northeast might be more profitable for underserved Southern farmers. In addition to research publications, the team plans various Extension publications and presentations for producers and agribusinesses to help develop profitable marketing strategies. The team includes academic research economists with experience in choice experiments and food marketing, an Extension specialist with experience working in the Black Belt and with minority-owned businesses, and state government partners.

## Kansas

**Recipient:** Kansas State University

**Project Type:** Cooperative Development

**Award Amount:** \$242,077.00

### *Electronic Supply Chain Information in Beef Cattle Production and Market Development*

Documented information is one of the most valuable resources cattle producers can use to improve sustainability, enhance animal health, increase traceability, facilitate supply chain management, and ultimately provide testimonials addressing consumer desires regarding meat production practices. However, collecting, recording, and forwarding animal production and animal health information downstream is cumbersome, time consuming, and costly. Furthermore, information has rarely been shared from cow-calf producers to downstream customers regarding animal production and health protocols. CalfDex, a cell phone app that was developed to record production information in the field for cow-calf producers in a 2020 FSMIP awarded grant, was completed to address these challenges. The app, publicly released in late 2023, has been downloaded by nearly 1,900 users. However, two major advancements are priorities to take CalfDex to the next level of recording, analyzing, and sharing production information from the ranch: 1) Building electronic cow and calf RFID ear tag scanner ID linking capabilities, and 2) Developing a website mirror to the CalfDex app. Through collaboration between Kansas State University (Agricultural Economics and Veterinary Medicine); U.S. CattleTrace; Stasyx; and Kansas Livestock Association, this project will accomplish these and other advancements to the information sharing system. The advancements will provide several important benefits for CalfDex adopters including increasing data accuracy, efficiency of entry, ease of use, greater data analytics, integration of data with consulting veterinarians, and facilitating downstream sharing of data as well as traceability enhancing overall beef supply chain coordination and beef market development.

## Texas

**Recipient:** Texas Department of Agriculture

**Project Type:** Cooperative Development

**Award Amount:** \$239,302.00

### *Creating Consumer Connections and Awareness through Retail "Buy Local" Initiatives*

The Texas Department of Agriculture is dedicated to boosting the consumption of products made in Texas by encouraging consumer purchases in retail stores across the state. This goal will be pursued by enhancing consumer awareness of the GO TEXAN mark, ensuring they understand its significance in making informed buying choices. To achieve this, the department plans to conduct educational campaigns about the mark's meaning and value. The project involves several key initiatives: researching and compiling a list of 50 potential new retail contacts; strengthening existing retail relationships through buyer meetings and on-site educational campaigns featuring GO TEXAN Partners sampling products; and launching a comprehensive digital and print advertising campaign. These efforts aim to familiarize Texans with the GO TEXAN mark and increase sales for GO TEXAN Partners. The project's beneficiaries include GO TEXAN Partners, who stand to gain increased sales through greater consumer recognition of the mark, as well as Texas consumers, who will make more informed purchasing

decisions. Additionally, retailers across Texas will benefit from access to locally sourced products for their stores. By creating opportunities for GO TEXAN Partners and staff to engage with consumers in retail settings, the initiative seeks to make the GO TEXAN mark synonymous with quality and local pride. This approach not only supports local businesses but also empowers consumers to support their community through their purchasing decisions.

## West Virginia

**Recipient:** West Virginia University

**Project Type:** Agricultural Product Development

**Award Amount:** \$200,000.00

### *Exploring and Developing Fiber-based Agricultural Products in West Virginia*

This proposal aims to transform the wool and fiber industry in West Virginia through a multidisciplinary approach. Highlighting the regenerative nature of wool farming, understanding its carbon impacts, communicating its value, exploring certifications, and adopting circular economy principles can create a resilient and profitable wool market. Collaborations between West Virginia University, West Virginia University Extension, West Virginia Department of Agriculture, and West Virginia Shepherds Federation will lead to the identification of fiber products for marketing and promotion through established local and state-wide retail outlets, innovate and enhance fiber products for adoption in multiple markets, establish localized supply chain links for steady market growth, and train local producers for the developing fiber markets. Through a system thinking approach, this project's outcomes will include a feasibility analysis for fiber production in West Virginia, a supply chain mapping of the producers, processors, and retailers for fiber-related goods, the development of novel fiber-related products and processing methods, training West Virginia fiber producers on improved shearing and fiber handling methods for increased access to markets, and the relaunching of a West Virginia Fiber Festival. It is expected that 60 processors will have gained knowledge about new market opportunities, 60 businesses will have gained knowledge about product processing, 30 new markets will increase sales and processing opportunities, and 30 new collaborations between producers, processors, and market access will be established. Because of the high variability in fiber product types, it is expected that a minimum of 50 new products will be created or enhanced.