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**Maine Dept. of Agriculture unveils new program for farmers**

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December 2, 2021

The Maine Department of Agriculture has recently announced plans for the Agriculture Infrastructure Investment Program, a program created to help Maine farmers and food processors upgrade aging infrastructure.

According to Jim Britt, director of communication at the department of agriculture, the program is backed by \$20 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act funds.

All funding will be available for Maine farms, agricultural food producers, and food processing businesses to support a number of activities, including capital improvements such as modifications to existing buildings and/or construction of new buildings at existing facilities; upgrades to utilities (including water, electric, heat, refrigeration, freezing, and waste facilities); growing, processing and manufacturing equipment and construction; and technology that allows increased capacity or business resilience.

For instance, software and hardware related to business functions, logistics, inventory management, and plant production and monitoring controls.

The Agriculture Infrastructure Investment Program will be accepting applications in December with complete details being announced soon.

Speaking of technology, Maine Governor Janet T. Mills announced in November that the state is awarding approximately \$500,000 to seven Maine organizations to invest in innovative technologies that will help Maine farmers enter new markets for Maine's specialty crops.

The Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry is awarding \$492,039 to Blue Barn LLC, Cumberland County Soil and Water Conservation District, Daybreak Growers Alliance, Maine Flower Collective, Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association, Maine Potato Board, and the University of Maine for projects that will expand research and innovation and strengthen agricultural sectors in Maine.

"This year's Specialty Crop Block Grant recipients are representative of the forward-thinking innovation our agricultural sector embodies," said DACF commissioner Amanda Beal. "From collaborative equipment sharing initiatives to researching cultural practices to reduce the incidence and spread of potato virus Y, the Department is proud to support these producers in their efforts to grow new markets and test technologies that enhance the resilience and sustainability of our production systems."

Starting in December, \$500,000 in USDA funding will be available to provide stress assistance and mental health resources for agricultural producers across the state. The DACF received the grant through the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture and it will be utilized to support the Maine Farmer and Rancher Stress Assistance Network.

Through a program with the University of Maine Cooperative Extension, the DACF's Bureau of Agriculture, Food and Rural Resources will use the funding to amplify existing provisions for mental

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health and farm stress.

“The pandemic, droughts, supply chain disruptions, and labor challenges are creating heightened levels of stress in our agriculture community,” Beal said. “We are committed to doing more to increase awareness and access to existing resources and finding new ways to help people to cope with stress and mental health challenges.”

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