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### **Specialty Crop Block Grant Supports JoCo Grows Agriculture Initiative**

**(Johnston County, NC - June 21, 2023)** – The Johnston County Tourism Authority has been awarded a second grant to continue the marketing efforts of the JoCo Grows Agriculture committee. Donna Bailey-Taylor submitted a grant application for the NC Specialty Crops Block Grant, entitled ***JoCo Grows Specialty Crops***, and was awarded \$149,315. This funding will support the JoCo Grows Agriculture Steering Committee’s efforts to market and gain awareness of the importance of agriculture in Johnston County.

“The Specialty Crop Block Grant Program aims to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops in the marketplace, and with these grant funds, our focus is to help our Johnston County farmers sell more, grow more, market more, and create unique on-farm experiences”, stated Donna Bailey-Taylor, President/CEO, Johnston County Visitors Bureau. “Grants funds are managed by the NC Department of Agriculture, through funding by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.”

The Visitors Bureau staff will work in partnership with the NC Cooperative Extension Johnston County Center and the JoCo Grows Agriculture Steering Committee over the next 24-months to execute the grant. Funds will market farms in Johnston County to increase consumption and access to specialty crops through marketing, education, and expanding on-farm experiences via an new exciting partnership with People First Tourism (P1t).

P1t will be working with the JCVB, Cooperative Extension staff, and county farmers to create unique, hands-on agritourism experiences. People First Tourism works to connect farmers with visitors and residents in a meaningful, sustainable, and profitable way. Through the P1t partnership public-facing farms can create, promote, and sell on-farm classes, workshops, tours, and events, allowing P1t to do the heavy logistical lifting of idea generation and promotion while still benefiting financially. More information, and ticket for the first round of on-farm events, can be found [here](#), with more to come.



“The Visitors Bureau has a long history of promoting agritourism in the county and working with the Johnston County Cooperative Extension Office, and we are excited to launch the many projects in the Specialty Crop Block Grant”, stated Bailey-Taylor.

The work involved in the JoCo Grows initiative continued to grow and so did the need for a staff member to champion the program. On Oct. 1, 2022, Nicole Youngblood officially joined the NC Cooperative Extension Service in Johnston County as an Agriculture Agent focusing on agriculture marketing and communications.

“We are so thankful to the NC Specialty Crop Block Grant for their support of the JoCo Grows Agriculture initiative,” said Bryant Spivey, County Extension Director - Johnston. “This effort grew out of recommendations from our Johnston County Extension Advisory Council as a way to connect the growing population of our county to local farms and agribusiness.”

To follow what the JoCo Grows Agriculture efforts entail, visit [jocogrows.org](http://jocogrows.org) and on social media, [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

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