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California Polytechnic State University

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Cal Poly College of Agriculture Receives \$2.8 Million State Grant To Create California Institute for the Study of Specialty Crops

SAN LUIS OBISPO - The California Department of Food and Agriculture has awarded more than \$2.8 million to Cal Poly's College of Agriculture for the creation of a special institute for the study of so-called specialty crops - crops that make up the majority of the state's \$27.6 billion-a-year agriculture industry.

The announcement was made today at the university by California Secretary of Food and Agriculture William (Bill) J. Lyons Jr. ([Lyons' remarks](#))

The CDFA awarded Cal Poly a total of \$2,869,565 in a three-year grant to fund the creation and three years of research and operation of the California Institute for the Study of Specialty Crops within the College of Agriculture. The money comes from the [CDFA's "Buy California" Initiative](#), which is funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"The research generated by this institute will complement the other specialty crop programs we have under way," said Lyons. "Our intent is for policy-makers and elected officials to use the institute as a resource when making decisions that affect agriculture."

Cal Poly's new institute will sponsor research by faculty members, graduate students and undergraduates into economic, policy and regulatory issues that affect specialty crops, which are defined as all crops except the agricultural commodities of wheat, cotton, rice, peanuts, tobacco, oil seeds and feed grains supported by USDA programs.

More than 90 percent of the crops grown in California are considered specialty crops, said Dave Wehner, dean of the College of Agriculture. They include everything from wine grapes to lettuce to herbs to timber.

The institute will share its research findings with agriculturalists, legislators, growers, grower associations and farm bureaus. It will also serve Cal Poly by giving professors, graduate students and undergraduates a chance to work on real-world issues and problems, Wehner said.

Cal Poly's specialty crops institute will add a new dimension to the study of California agriculture, Wehner said. Matters affecting agriculture in general are already the focus of the Agricultural Issues Center at UC Davis.

Cal Poly was asked by the CDFA to put together a proposal for the specialty crops institute in part because of the College of Agriculture faculty's track record in research projects sponsored by the state's Agricultural Research Initiative and because of its focus on preparing students for careers in the agriculture industry, Wehner said.

The College of Agriculture has received more than \$5.4 million over the past five years to conduct research on environmental influences on the glassy winged sharpshooter (a wine grape pest), natural pest management for the wine grape industry, evaporation losses in the state's irrigated agricultural land, and other topics.

Cal Poly will set up the institute and begin research work during the 2003-2004 academic year, with Agribusiness Professor Jay Noel as interim director.

The university hopes to receive industry support to continue the institute and its research after the grant period expires, Wehner said.

"California produces more than \$27 billion worth of agricultural products annually, and our faculty and students can do a lot of research work in support of the industry," Wehner said. "The research that we do is very complementary to our teaching focus. And Cal Poly already has a lot of credibility within the production agriculture industry.

"We count among our alumni some of the most successful agricultural producers and policy-makers in the nation," Wehner said. "And we think the research we will be doing here will demonstrate a direct benefit to California's agricultural industry."

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