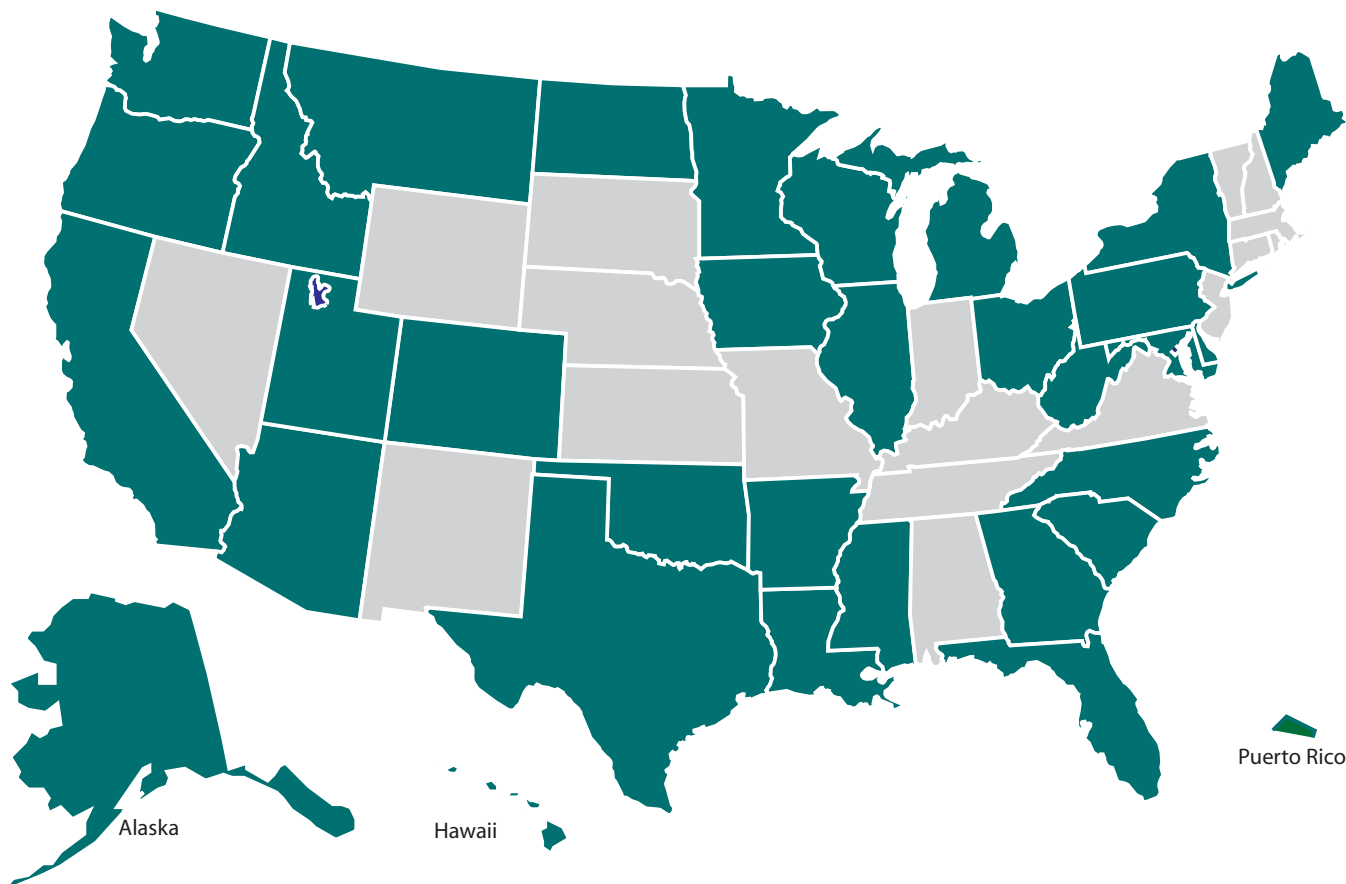


■ = STATES WHERE ARS DOES RESEARCH ON SPECIALTY CROPS



ARS Specialty Crops Research Program

Specialty crops research cuts across many ARS national research programs, though it is not, in itself, a separate national program. Issues include all conventional crop production needs, from genetic improvement for better insect and disease resistance to improving production methods to enhancing postharvest storage. The FY 2007 ARS research budget for specialty crops is \$192.5 million and is spread among fruits, vegetables, berries, tree nuts, ornamental crops, and even sweet corn for culinary use.

Why are specialty crops receiving so much research attention these days? While specialty crops grow on less than 3 percent of the agricultural acreage in the United States, their value represents almost 40 percent of U.S. crop dollars. And with the wide variety of crops involved, research that makes specialty crops more successful can open up new possibilities for farmers and help diversify agriculture.

In addition to the fundamental production areas, specialty crops research must also address complex issues—such as enhancing nutritional content, reducing harm to natural resources, and food safety—on a large number of diverse crops.

Consumers expect their fruits and vegetables to be free of bacterial contamination. An outbreak such as the *E. coli* O157:

H7 on spinach last fall spotlights the fact that food safety is a critical part of the specialty crops research program. But while food safety research is complicated by the many different crops and the wide variety of growing and harvesting systems involved, research on one specialty crop can supply new information that may be applicable to others.

The current *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* emphasize increased consumption of fruits and vegetables, which include the bulk of specialty crops. To meet these needs, agriculture must grow many more fruits and vegetables and keep the price down to where most Americans can afford them. This fact accents the need for ARS specialty crop research to find ways to help improve the farmer's bottom line by developing new and better crops and better ways to grow them.

Specialty crops production is also becoming more complicated by competing pressures for water resources, salinity buildup in soil, declining land availability, and other issues involving natural resources. Growers are looking to ARS research to help reduce any harm to the environment while maintaining economic competitiveness.

With ARS specialty crops research touching on so wide an array of national programs, coordination is essential to making the best use of all resources. With so many crops and production systems involved, it makes for a complex and intricate network of interrelated programs. ★