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NEWS Release

For Immediate Release

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A Proven Government Funded Program Celebrates 50 years of Providing Tools for Specialty Crop Growers

Date: January 16, 2013

Princeton, NJ-- In a time of financial austerity the IR-4 Project is a government program that provides real results for stakeholders with a proven track record that spans 50 years. In 1963, the IR-4Project was established by the Directors of the State Agricultural Experiment Stations to create a program to assist growers of fruits, vegetables, herbs and other specialty crops with their critical pest management needs. What began as a two-person operation at Rutgers University has grown to a multi-million dollar research organization with over 120 employees and a presence in nearly every state. Since its humble beginnings, the research performed by the men and women of the IR-4 Project has facilitated 26,000 registrations of conventional pesticides and biopesticides for food and ornamental crops. The majority of these registrations were approved in the last 10 years. Many of these recent approvals were with lower risk technology.

Today, many of the IR-4 facilitated specialty crop plant protection product registrations are fundamental to pest management strategies that include using techniques that are sustainable and environmentally friendly. According to Ray Ratto of Ratto Bros. Farms in Modesto, CA , "Without IR-4, California specialty crop growers would be left with very few tools to protect their crops and their livelihoods. The general public reaps enormous benefits from IR-4's activities by having a year round, broad availability of healthy fruits and vegetables that can be purchased at reasonable prices."

IR-4 also focuses its research efforts on ornamental horticulture, which provide plants that enrich our communities and the environment. Craig Regelbrugge from the American Nursery and Landscape Association stated, "Over the years, IR-4 has played an instrumental role facilitating the registration of over half of the crop protection tools available to nursery and greenhouse crop farmers. Having access to tools and technologies that would not otherwise be available for use in our industry helps our growers produce healthy crops while protecting both consumers and the environment from the threat of invasive plant pests and diseases."

And more recently, IR-4 initiated a Public Health Pesticide program that focuses on providing pest management solutions for arthropods that vector disease. Roger S. Nasci, Chief of the Arborviral Diseases Branch at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, stated, "Reducing mosquito population abundance is often the only intervention available to reduce the risk of disease due to West Nile, dengue and Chikungunya viruses. IR-4's efforts assure that we have a variety of effective public health pesticides registered and available to meet the growing needs of the U.S. and international health communities."

Clear advances result from the public and private sector investment in IR-4, which stands at over $38 million of direct and in-kind support. The Center for Economic Analysis at Michigan State University recently studied IR-4's impact on U.S. Gross Domestic Product and concluded that IR-4 contributes more than $7.2 billion to U.S. GDP and is anticipated to support research and industry sales sufficient to support 104,650 U.S. jobs.

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Major funding for IR-4 is provided by Special Research Grants and Hatch Act Funds from USDA-NIFA, in cooperation with the State Agricultural Experiment Stations, and USDA-ARS.

IR-4 Executive Director, Jerry Baron, stated, “Our economy and quality of life has been improved by the efforts of IR-4, but the story doesn’t end at fifty years, as pests become resistant and new pests emerge from other countries, newer technologies will need research. IR-4 is looking forward to the next fifty years of helping specialty crop growers continue to fight pests to protect their valuable commodities.”

To learn more about IR-4 visit www.ir4.rutgers.edu.

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The IR-4 Project’s headquarters and regional offices are housed at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey (Headquarters), University of California-Davis (Western Region), Cornell University (Northeast Region), University of Florida (Southern Region), and Michigan State University (North Central Region). Major funding for IR-4 is provided by Special Research Grants and Hatch Act Funds from USDA-NIFA, in cooperation with the State Agricultural Experiment Stations, and USDA-ARS. State Agricultural Experiment Stations provide in-kind support valued at over $10 million annually.