



Specialty Crop Block Grant Program
Request for Applications

2023

Project Proposal Concept
Deadline March 1, 2023

Section I.
INTRODUCTION

It is the intent of the Arkansas Department of Agriculture (Department) to develop and submit a state proposal to the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) in response to the **2023 SCBGP Request for Applications (RFA)** from the United States Department of Agriculture/Agricultural Marketing Service (USDA/AMS).

The Department's proposal will consist of selected projects that will significantly and positively impact the competitiveness of Arkansas's specialty crops. This RFA provides all interested parties an opportunity to submit Project Concept Proposals for inclusion in the Department's application to USDA-AMS.

The Department will accept project proposals that request at a minimum of \$20,000. Note: Awarding of this grant is contingent upon funding from the USDA.

All projects granted funding can start no earlier than October 1, 2023 and must end no later than September 20, 2025. Under some circumstances, the Department reserves the right to allow a no-cost extension to subrecipients. Requests for a no-cost extension must be submitted in writing.

Section II.
PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Authorization: The Specialty Crop Block Grant Program is authorized under section 101 of the Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004 (7 U.S.C. 1621 note) and amended under section 10010 of the Agricultural Act of 2014, Public Law 113-79 (the Farm Bill). SCBGP is currently implemented under 7 CFR part 1291 (published March 27, 2009; 74 FR 13313).

Purpose: The Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) assists state departments of agriculture in the 50 States, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands in solely enhancing the competitiveness of U.S. grown specialty crops. Specialty crops are fruits and vegetables, dried fruit, tree nuts, horticulture, and nursery crops (including floriculture). More information on the general terms and conditions can be found here: ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/FY2021_GD_TermsandConditions.pdf

State Authority: The Arkansas Department of Agriculture is responsible for developing the State's proposal to USDA and overseeing approved funded projects. Proposals must be structured so that the Department maintains control of the project objectives, sets policy, and ensures that projects are carried out in accordance with all applicable Federal statutes and regulations as well as with the Grant Agreement and the Terms and Conditions of Award.

The Department is also responsible for ensuring that subrecipients maintain appropriate records and follow all applicable Federal statutes and regulations as well as the Grant Agreement and the Terms and Conditions of Award. It is the Department's obligation to ensure that its proposal and, therefore, all approved project proposals, are appropriate for the SCBGP.

In this Request for Applications, please note that “**subrecipients**” refers to those who have submitted project proposals that were subsequently selected by the Department and then approved by USDA-AMS for participation in the SCBGP.

Section III. **ELIGIBILITY**

Project proposals will be accepted from Arkansas’s state and local government entities, colleges and universities, 501(c)3 non-profit organizations, producer associations, industry or community-based groups, and other specialty crop organizations.

Applicants may submit more than one proposal. If more than one proposal is submitted, please indicate the priority level of each submission.

Single organizations, institutions, and individuals are encouraged to participate as project partners but are not eligible to apply as the lead of the project. Applications for grant funds should describe how the project potentially affects and produces measurable outcomes for the specialty crop industry and/or the public rather than a single organization, institution, or individual.

Grant funds will not be awarded for projects that solely benefit a particular commercial product or provide a profit to a single organization, institution, or individual. In addition, recipients and subrecipients cannot use grant funds to compete unfairly with private companies that provide equivalent products or services.

Projects where one organization specifically attempts to disparage the mission, goals, and/or actions of another organization are unallowable.

Section IV. **HOW TO APPLY: PROJECT PROPOSAL GUIDELINES**

The application process is a two-phase process. This is designed to maximize the time available to both the applicant and the Department to ensure a high-quality application is submitted to USDA. For questions or comments on applying, contact the Department’s Marketing and Communications Director Amy Lyman at amy.lyman@agriculture.arkansas.gov or by calling (501) 225-1598.

Preliminary Applicant Information: On April 4, 2022, the unique entity identifier changed from the Data University Number System (DUNS) Number to the Unique Entity Identifier (UEI). Each applicant must have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) and a Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN) at the time of application.

Potential applicants and sub-applicants may acquire a UEI or transition their DUNS number to a UEI at sam.gov/content/duns-uei.

Phase 1: Project Concept Proposal: Applicants will submit project proposals using the online Project Concept Proposal form located at:
<https://www.cognitofrms.com/ArkansasAgriculture1/SpecialtyCropBlockGrant2023ProjectConceptProposal>

This is a preliminary form that ensures that the basic requirements of the program are met and allows the idea itself to be presented in a clear and concise format. The deadline to submit a Project Concept Proposal is **March 1, 2023 by 11:59 p.m. CST.**

Initial Review and Selection: Project Concept Proposals will be reviewed by a review committee that will recommend to the Secretary of Agriculture which projects should be included in ADA’s application to USDA. Members of the committee will sign affirmations certifying that no conflict of interest exists between themselves and the applications they review.

Initial Review and Selection Criteria	
To what extent will the proposed project increase consumption or enhance the competitiveness of the specialty crop benefiting from the project?	20%
What is the economic value of the crop(s) benefiting from this project proportionate to the total value of Arkansas’s specialty crop industry?	20%
Does this project address a significant problem or important need and will a number of growers or operations be impacted?	20%
Is the budget realistic and will the project yield a positive return on investment?	10%
Are the goals realistic and attainable?	10%
Do the measurable outcomes appropriately track success of supporting the project’s purpose and whether the goals will be attained?	10%
Does the project have the support and include participation of producers, handlers, or others in the industry?	10%

Phase 2: Selected Applicants Invited to Complete Application: Applicants who have been selected by the review committee to participate in the Department’s 2023 SCBGP application will be notified of their inclusion in **late March** and asked to complete the project profile template required by USDA. The Department will provide the necessary documents in the selection notification and will announce a final deadline for all information to be received.

Applicants may be required to adjust their proposals to comply with SCBGP rules, regulations, and guidance. The Department may require budget adjustments as a condition for inclusion in the Department’s application. No final awards to any sub-grantee will be made until a final grant award is made to the Department by USDA-AMS.

Section V.
TYPES OF PROJECTS

The purpose of the SCBGP is to provide funding for projects that enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops in Arkansas. The project proposal must focus on research, education, or marketing and benefit the specialty crop industry. Specialty crops are fruits and vegetables, dried fruit, tree nuts, horticulture, and nursery crops (including floriculture). More information on specialty crops can be found on the USDA website here: ams.usda.gov/services/grants/scbgp/specialty-crop.

Funding Priorities/Focus Areas: The following have been identified as funding priorities for the SCBGP for Arkansas:

- Enhancing food safety;
- Improving the capacity of all entities in the specialty crop distribution chain to comply with the requirements of the Food Safety Modernization Act (21 U.S.C. Chapter 27), for example, developing “Good Agricultural Practices,” “Good Handling Practices,” “Good Manufacturing Practices,” and in cost-share arrangements for funding audits of such systems (including USDA GroupGAP) for small farmers, packers, and processors;
- Investing in specialty crop research, including research to focus on conservation and environmental outcomes;
- Developing new and improved seed varieties and specialty crops;
- Pest and disease control;
- Increasing child and adult nutrition knowledge and consumption of specialty crops;
- Improving efficiency and reducing costs of distribution systems; and
- Sustainability

The funding priorities listed above are paired with the corresponding USDA Outcomes, a requirement of all project proposals. More information on the USDA Outcomes can be found here: ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/SCBGPPerformanceMeasures.pdf.

Section VI.
FUNDING REQUESTS

SCBGP proposals may include direct costs only.

Direct costs are costs that can be identified specifically with a particular award, project or program, service, or other organizational activity or that can be directly assigned to such an activity relatively easily with a high degree of accuracy. Typically, direct costs include, but are not limited to, compensation of employees who work directly on the award to include salaries and fringe benefits, travel, equipment, and supplies directly benefiting the grant-supported project or program.

Section VII.

REPORTING AND REIMBURSEMENT REQUIREMENTS

Subrecipients will be required to report information to the Department on a semi-annual basis about the progress of the project as well as through an annual mandatory monitoring call. A final report will be required of each subrecipient as well.

Grant subrecipients will request reimbursement on a quarterly basis. All payments will be on a reimbursement basis. All payments will be made in accordance with 2 CFR 200.305 and all statutes, rules, and policies governing the SCBGP as well as applicable Arkansas law.

Requests for payments should be scheduled so that all project funds are dispersed by the end of the project performance period. The Department cannot reimburse expenses incurred after the grant performance period has ended. Any project fund remaining unused may be redirected to other projects by the Department. If any overpayment is made by the Department, the excess funds must immediately be refunded back to the Department.

Final payments or reimbursements may be withheld until final reports have been submitted and approved. It is the obligation of subrecipients to keep accurate and complete records. Failure to provide any requested information may result in withholding project funds.

Section VIII.

FINAL INFORMATION

General Restrictions and Limitations: All SCBGP awards are subject to the most recent award terms and conditions, Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (2 CFR part 200), and other laws and regulations affecting Federal assistance. All costs must be allowable in accordance with the Federal cost principles outlined in 2 CFR part 200 Subpart E. An application funded with the release of Federal funds through a grant award does not constitute, or imply compliance with Federal regulations. Grant recipients and subrecipients are responsible for ensuring that their activities comply with all applicable Federal regulations.

Equal Opportunity Statement: The Department abides by the Equal Opportunity Statement contained in the 2023 SCBGP Request for Applications by the United States Department of Agriculture/Agricultural Marketing Service in administering grants funds.

Prohibition on Using Funds Under Grants and Cooperative Agreements with Entities that Require Certain Internal Confidentiality Agreements: By submission of its proposal or application, the applicant represents that it does not require any of its employees, contractors, or sub-recipients seeking to report fraud, waste, or abuse to sign or comply with internal confidentiality agreements or statements prohibiting or otherwise restricting those employees, contractors, or subrecipients from lawfully reporting that waste, fraud, or abuse to a designated investigative or law enforcement representative of a Federal department or agency authorized to receive such information. Note that: (1) the basis for this representation is a prohibition in sections 743, 744 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016, Pub. L. 114-113, (Division E,

Title VII, General Provisions Government-wide) and any successor provisions of law on making funds available through grants and cooperative agreements to entities with certain internal confidentiality agreements or statements; and (2) section 744 states that it does not contravene requirements applicable to Standard Form 312, Form 4414, or any other form issued by a Federal department or agency governing the nondisclosure of classified information.

Allowable and Unallowable Costs and Activities: All USDA AMS awards are subject to the terms and conditions, cost principles, and other considerations described in the AMS General Terms and Conditions. More information, including a table of allowable costs can be found at ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/FY2021_GD_TermsandConditions.pdf.