

ARKANSAS
AGRICULTURE
DEPARTMENT



*Arkansas Agriculture Department
Specialty Crop Block Grant Program
Request for Proposals*

I. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004 authorizes the United States Department of Agriculture to make grants available to provide assistance for specialty crops. The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Farm Bill) amended the Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004 and authorized the USDA to provide grants to States for each of the fiscal years 2008 through 2012 to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. These grants are to be utilized by state departments of agriculture solely to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops.

Each state submitting an application that is approved by USDA will receive a base grant of approximately \$181,210.00 plus an additional amount based on the value of specialty crop production in the state in relation to the national value of specialty crop production. The Agriculture Marketing Service (AMS) of USDA has published a Notice of Funds Availability (NOFA) in the Federal Register (page 5561, Vol. 75, No. 22) inviting applications for the Specialty Crop Block Grant – Farm Bill (SCBG-FB) with a proposed amount that each state could receive. Although the AMS has not officially released funds to the states, AAD anticipates \$270,128.00 will be available for the State of Arkansas.

It is the intent of the Arkansas Agriculture Department (AAD) to develop a state plan requesting funds to implement projects that will significantly and positively impact the specialty crop industry in Arkansas. This invitation for proposals has been developed to provide all interested parties an opportunity to apply for these funds.

II. ELIGIBLE GRANT APPLICANTS

The Arkansas Agriculture Department is the authorized agency to assume the lead role in the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program. According to USDA guidelines, grant funds cannot be awarded for projects that solely benefit a particular commercial product or provide a profit to a single organization, institution, or individual because these projects do not enhance the specialty crop industry's competitiveness. Proposals are encouraged

from state and local organizations, academia, 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 prioritize the submissions.

III. ELIGIBLE GRANT PROJECTS

To be eligible for a grant, projects must solely enhance the competitiveness of U.S. or U.S. territory grown specialty crops in either domestic or foreign markets. Specialty Crops are defined as fruits and vegetables, dried fruit, tree nuts, horticulture, and nursery crops (including floriculture). Examples of “enhancing the competitiveness” of specialty crops include, but are not limited to: increasing child and adult nutrition knowledge and consumption of specialty crops; improving efficiency and reducing costs of distribution systems; assisting all entities in the specialty crop distribution chain in developing “Good Agricultural Practices”, “Good Handling Practices”, “Good Manufacturing Practices”, and in cost-share arrangements for funding audits of such systems for small farmers, packers and processors; investing in specialty crop research, including research to focus on conservation and environmental outcomes; enhancing food safety; developing new and improved seed varieties and specialty crops; pest and disease control; and development of organic and sustainable production practices.

Projects may also increase the competitiveness of specialty crop farmers, including Native American and disadvantaged farmers. Increasing competitiveness may include developing local and regional food systems, and improving food access in underserved communities.

Applications for grant funds should describe how the project potentially impacts 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. Single organizations, institutions, and individuals are encouraged to participate as project partners.

The grant proposal application can have a value of up to \$75,000 and a minimum of \$5,000. AAD will carefully review and evaluate each proposal based on the criteria listed in these guidelines, after all applications have been submitted to AAD. AAD will make one grant submission to the USDA composed of the projects approved by AAD. Once approval is received from USDA, AAD will notify applicants (sub-grantees) of their status. No final awards to any sub-grantee will be made until a final grant award is made to AAD (grantor) by USDA.

Projects must be completed within three calendar years after the AAD/USDA grant agreement is signed.

IV. RESTRICTIONS AND LIMITATIONS ON GRANT FUNDS

Specialty Crop Block Grant Funds shall not be used to cover the following expenses:

- Paying off existing debt
- Substituting existing efforts or research already funded
- Purchase of equipment, land, or buildings
- Business entertainment or business gifts
- Lobbying or political efforts
- Donations and contributions

Grant funds shall supplement the expenditure of State funds in support of specialty crops grown in Arkansas, rather than replace State funds.

V. APPLICATION GUIDELINES

Completed applications must include a signed Acknowledgement form and a narrative explaining how grant funds will be utilized to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. The length may vary depending on the nature of the project, however please limit to 6 pages if possible. The acceptable font size for the narrative is 12 pitch. The following format is to be followed:

- **Acknowledgement.** See Attachment I. The Acknowledgement must be signed by the authorized representative(s) of the proposing organization.
- **Cover Page and Project Abstract.** Include the name of the applicant (or lead agency in the case of multi-agency projects) administering the project along with address, name of contact person, phone, fax, and email address. An abstract of 200 or fewer words describing the proposed project is also required.
- **Project Purpose.**
 - Clearly state the purpose of each project. The purpose should include the specific issue, problem, interest, or need to be addressed and why the project is important and timely.
 - If the project is a state marketing program, describe how the State will ensure that funding is being used to solely enhance the competitiveness of eligible specialty crops.
 - If the project builds on projects previously funded through the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, indicate clearly how the new project compliments previous work.
 - Indicate if the project will be or has been submitted to or funded by another Federal or State grant program.
- **Potential Impact.**
 - Discuss the number of people or operations affected.
 - Include the intended beneficiaries of each project.

- Provide information on the potential economic impact if such data are available and relevant to the project.
- **Expected Measurable Outcomes.**
 - Describe at least one distinct, quantifiable, and measurable outcome that directly and meaningfully supports the project's purpose. The outcome-oriented objective must define an event or condition that is external to the project and that is of direct importance to the intended beneficiaries and/or the public.
 - Provide a timeframe when outcome measures will be achieved. Outcome oriented objectives may be long term that exceed the grant period.
 - Describe how the project outcome will be measured. Describe the plan that will be used to show performance improvements. Include a performance-monitoring plan to describe the process of collecting and analyzing data to meet the outcome-oriented objectives.
- **Work Plan.**
 - Explain briefly the activities that will be performed to accomplish the objectives of the project.
 - Provide a timeline for accomplishing each activity. Make sure to include the month and year the project is scheduled to begin. Indicate who will do the work of each activity.
- **Budget Narrative.** Provide an itemized budget and a budget narrative with sufficient detail about the budget categories listed below. All requested budget items/activities should correlate to the purpose/goals of the project and demonstrate that they are reasonable and adequate for the proposed work.
 - **Travel.** Indicate the destination, purpose of trip, number of people traveling, number of days traveling, total airfare costs if applicable, total ground transportation costs if applicable, total lodging and meals costs if applicable, and total mileage costs for the travel if applicable.
 - **Supplies.** Provide an itemized list of projected supply expenditures, their intended use, and the dollar amount for each item.
 - **Contractual.** Provide a short description of the services each contract covers and the flat rate fee or the total hourly rate. Compensation for individual consultant services should be reasonable and consistent with that paid for similar services in the marketplace. NOTE: Consultant service fees may not exceed \$130,000 or \$500 per eight-hour day, excluding travel and subsistence costs.
 - **Other.** Provide detailed descriptions of other costs such as conferences or meetings, communications, speaker/trainer fees, publication costs, and data collection, and other budgeted costs associated with each project.

- a) Conferences/Meetings - Costs of holding a conference or meeting are included in this category. Some examples are the rental of facilities or equipment for the meeting. Details of costs for each conference or meeting should be broken out and provided in the budget.

NOTE: Meals may not be charged as project costs when individuals decide to go to lunch or dinner together when no need exists for continuity of a meeting. Such activity is considered to be an entertainment cost. Meals may be charged to the project if such activity maintains the continuity of the meeting and to do otherwise will impose arduous conditions on the meeting participants. Some examples of acceptable reasons are that the conference facility is located in a remote area where public facilities are not accessible; there will be a speaker and business discussions during the meal; there is insufficient time available to allow participants to go out on their own. If one or more of these justifications cannot be met, or if there are no other acceptable and compelling reasons, then the meals should not be charged to the award. The attendees should be responsible for providing their own meals.

NOTE: Breakfasts for conference attendees are usually considered unallowable as it is expected these individuals will have sufficient time to obtain this meal on their own before the conference begins in the morning. This does not pertain to persons in a travel status. When paying for the travel of a person to attend a conference, meals and lodging may be included in the cost without additional justification.

- b) Communications - Mailings, postage, express mail, faxes, and telephone long distance charges. Provide the estimated cost for this category.
- c) Speaker/Trainer Fees - Provide the amount of the speakers' fees and a description of the services being provided.
- d) Publication Costs - Provide the estimated cost of printing of brochures and other program materials or scientific or technical journals.
- e) Data collection - Provide the estimated cost of collecting performance data to measure the project outcome measures.
 - o **Program Income.** If program income will be earned on any project, indicate the nature and source of program income and the estimated amount. For example, if registration fees are being collected at a conference as part of the project, indicate the estimated amount of registration fees that will be collected. If program income is earned, it may be used for 1) expanding the project or program; 2) continuing the project or program after the sub grant support ends; and 3) supporting other projects or programs that further the broad objectives of the grant program.
- **Project Oversight.** Describe the oversight practices that provide sufficient

knowledge of grant activities to ensure proper and efficient administration.

- **Project Commitment.** Describe how all grant partners commit to and work toward the goals and outcome measures of the proposed project.
- **Multi-state Projects.** (If applicable) Describe how the States are going to collaborate effectively with related projects.

Completed application packets must be **postmarked by May 24, 2010. No late applications will be accepted.** An electronic version of the application, preferably in Microsoft Word format, as well as a hard copy is required.

Mail completed applications to:
Zachary Taylor
Director of Marketing
Arkansas Agriculture Department
1 Natural Resource Drive
Little Rock, AR 72205
[Email: Zachary.taylor@aad.ar.gov](mailto:Zachary.taylor@aad.ar.gov)
Phone: (501) 219-6324

VI. APPLICATION EVALUATION AND SELECTION PROCESS

Grant applications will be reviewed by an Advisory Committee. Applications will be evaluated based on the merit of the submitted proposal narrative and the criteria listed below. See Application Guidelines in the previous section for requirements. The Advisory Committee may recommend adjustments to the monetary grant requests, proposed scope of work, and/or project budgets.

Weight	Criteria	Rating
20%	To what extent will the proposed project increase consumption or enhance the competitiveness of the specialty crop benefiting from the project?	
10%	What is the economic value of the crop(s) benefiting from this project proportionate to the total value of Arkansas' specialty crop industry?	
20%	Does this project address a significant problem or important need and will a number of growers or operations be impacted?	

10%	Is the budget realistic and will the project yield a positive return on investment? Has the proposed project been accompanied with matching funds?	
10%	Are the goals realistic and obtainable?	
10%	Do the measurable outcomes appropriately track success in supporting the project's purpose and whether the goals will be attained?	
20%	Does the project have the support and participation of producers, handlers or others in the industry?	

* The rating of the criteria is based on range from 1 to 10 with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest.

VII. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Grant recipients will be responsible for submitting progress reports to AAD as required.

Quarterly Reports: Quarterly reports detailing progress being made towards the project along with a breakdown of expenses shall be submitted quarterly to AAD.

Annual Performance Reports: Grantees shall submit an annual performance report to AAD. Annual performance reports shall include the following:

- **Activities Performed.**
 - Briefly summarize activities performed, targets, and/or performance goals achieved during the reporting period. Whenever possible, describe the work accomplished in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Include the significant results, accomplishments, conclusions and recommendations. Include favorable or unusual developments.
 - Provide a comparison of actual accomplishments with the goals established for the reporting period.
 - Present the significant contributions and role of project partners in the project.
 - Clearly convey progress toward achieving outcomes by illustrating baseline data that has been gathered to date and showing the progress toward achieving set targets.
 - If a target of a project has already been achieved, the grantee is encouraged to amend the outcome measure. This permits the project staff to “stretch” the goals in order to go beyond what they are already doing.

- **Problems and Delays.**

- Note unexpected delays, impediments, and challenges that have been confronted in order to complete the goals for each project. Explain why these changes took place.
- Mention the actions that were taken in order to address these delays, impediments, and challenges.
- Review measurable outcomes to determine if targets are realistic and attainable. An objective that is too stringent should be scaled back and identified in the performance report. Keep in mind that targets may slip due to all kinds of factors, such as employee turn-over and bad weather.
- In the event that the work plan timeline, expected measurable outcomes, budget, and/or methodology needs to be adjusted, provide an outline of those changes.

- **Future Project Plans.**

- Briefly summarize activities performed, targets, and/or performance goals to be achieved during the next reporting period for each project. Whenever possible, describe the work accomplished in both quantitative and qualitative terms.
- Describe any changes that are anticipated in the project.

- **Funding Expended To Date.**

- Provide information regarding the level of grant funds expended to date.
- In the event that a project gained income as a result of planned activities, provide the amount of this supplemental funding and how it will be reinvested into the project.

Final Report: Final reports will be submitted to AAD. Final reports will include the following:

- **Project Title.**

- **Project Summary.**

- Provide a background for the initial purpose of the project, which includes the specific issue, problem, or need that was addressed by this project.
- Establish the motivation for this project by presenting the importance and timeliness of the project.
- If the project is built on a previously funded project through the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, describe how this project complimented and enhanced previously completed work.

- **Project Approach.**

- Briefly summarize activities performed and tasks performed during the grant period. Whenever possible, describe the work accomplished in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Include the significant results, accomplishments, conclusions and recommendations. Include favorable or unusual developments.
- Present the significant contributions and role of project partners in the project.

- **Goals and Outcomes Achieved.**

- Supply the activities that were completed in order to achieve the performance goals and measurable outcomes for the project.
- If outcome measures were long term, summarize the progress that has been made towards achievement.
- Provide a comparison of actual accomplishments with the goals established for the reporting period.
- Clearly convey completion of achieving outcomes by illustrating baseline data that has been gathered to date and showing the progress toward achieving set targets.

- **Beneficiaries.**

- Provide a description of the groups and other operations that benefited from the completion of this project's accomplishments.
- Clearly state the quantitative data that concerns the beneficiaries affected by the project's accomplishments and/or the potential economic impact of the project.

- **Lessoned Learned.**

- Offer insights into the lessons learned by the project staff as a result of completing this project. This section is meant to illustrate the positive and negative results and conclusions for the project.
- Provide unexpected outcomes or results that were an effect of implementing this project.
- If goals or outcome measures were not achieved, identify and share the lessons learned to help others expedite problem-solving.

- **Contact Person.**

- Name the Contact Person for the Project.
- Telephone Number.
- Email Address.

- **Additional Information.**
 - Provide additional information available (i.e. publications, websites, photographs) that is not applicable to any of the prior sections.

VIII. REQUESTS FOR PAYMENT

Grant recipients must request payments of grant funds at least on a quarterly basis. Quarterly cash advances shall be limited to the minimum amounts needed to meet current disbursement needs of that particular quarter.

Requests for payments should be scheduled so that all grant funds are obligated (unencumbered) at the end of the grant agreement and disbursed within 30 days after the end date of the grant agreement. Any un-obligated (unencumbered) balance of cash at the end of this period must immediately be refunded back to AAD.

The obligation of funds may be terminated without further cause unless the grantee commences the timely drawdown of funds; initial drawdown must be made within the first year of the grant period.

For more information about the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, please view the program outline at www.ams.usda.gov/scbgp

ATTACHMENT I

Acknowledgement

I/we the undersigned applicants, _____ of
(Name/names)
_____, Arkansas, hereby apply for Specialty Crop Block Grant Program
(City/cities)

Funds under the terms and conditions of the AAD and the United States Department of Agriculture, in the amount of \$_____.
(Amount requested)

The undersigned hereby warrants to the State of Arkansas that to the best of my/our knowledge, all information presented in this grant application is factual and true; that I/we understand that if this proposal is funded, I/we will be required to sign a grant agreement and other necessary documentation containing terms and conditions upon which funds will be released; and that I/we understand that I/we will be required to submit progress reports (quarterly and annually) and a final report at the completion of the project as a condition to participating in this grant program. All grant funding is subject to the availability and receipt of federal funds by AAD.

The undersigned understands that the selection will be determined by AAD based on criteria designed to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops in Arkansas. The undersigned understands, due to the availability of a limited supply of funds, that every qualifying project may not be approved or receive funding and that approved projects may be funded in whole or part.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Print: _____ Title: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Print: _____ Title: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Print: _____ Title: _____