



South Carolina
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Hugh E. Weathers, Commissioner

2025 SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM

REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

APPLICATION DUE DATE: 11:59 PM ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2025

South Carolina Department of Agriculture

Attn: Hannah Arndt

PO Box 11280

Columbia, SC 29211

803-939-5751

scspecialtycropblockgrant.com

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Please read all materials before preparing and submitting the application. Failure to follow the instructions and requirements described in this Request for Applications (RFA) may result in the disqualification of the application.

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PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

A. INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

The South Carolina Department of Agriculture (SCDA) hereby requests applications for projects designed to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops grown in South Carolina. Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) funds will be made available to South Carolina from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for the 2025 fiscal year budget to be administered by SCDA.

USDA determines the amount awarded to each state which is derived from a formula using the value of specialty crop production to the amount of acreage devoted to specialty crop production within that state. The United States Department of Agriculture- Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) has not at this time announced the award amount that will be made available for programmatic activities in South Carolina. However, over the last five years, the SCDA has been awarded an average of \$586,688.00 in Specialty Crop Block Grant funds. This figure once announced is subject to change.

The SCBGP 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 (Farm Bill). SCBGP is currently implemented under 7 CFR part 1291. Each state submits an application (referred to as the State Plan) that is reviewed and approved by AMS personnel. In an effort to reach specialty crop initiatives throughout the state, the SCDA has established a competitive grant process for these funds.

SCDA will accept applications for these funds through **11:59 PM on Friday, February 14, 2025**. All applications received by the SCDA Grants Administration office on or before **February 14** will be carefully reviewed and evaluated based on the criteria posted at: ams.usda.gov/scbgp. In the two-step competitive review process, external agricultural experts will review all eligible project applications objectively to assign scores. The scores will then be used to rank the projects to be presented before a selection committee which will determine which projects will be funded and the amount for which each one will be awarded.

B. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Specialty crops are defined by law as “fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops (including floriculture).” Eligible plants must be cultivated or

managed and used by people for food, medicinal purposes, and/or aesthetic gratification to be considered specialty crops. Processed products shall consist of greater than 50% of the specialty crop by weight, exclusive of added water. For purposes of the SCBGP, honey is considered to be a horticultural crop and is therefore a specialty crop. A complete list of USDA AMS-approved specialty crops can be found at: ams.usda.gov/scbgp. Note: For the purposes of this grant program, USDA AMS does not recognize hemp as a specialty crop.

Beginning Farmer is an individual or entity that has not operated a farm or ranch for more than 10 years and substantially participates in the operation.

Socially Disadvantaged Farmer is a farmer who is a member of a Socially Disadvantaged Group. A Socially Disadvantaged Group is a group whose members have been subject to discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or a part of an individual’s income is derived from any public assistance program.

C. ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Applications will only be accepted from producer groups, industry, or community-based organizations involved with specialty crops. Each application must describe a project that meets the following criteria:

1. Clearly demonstrate that the purpose is to enhance the competitiveness of a specialty crop industry in South Carolina.
2. Use funds for activities that benefit the promotion, consumption, and/or accessibility of specialty crops in South Carolina.
3. Benefit more than one individual, institution, or organization. Grant funds will not be awarded for projects that directly benefit or provide a profit to a single organization, institution or individual.
4. Special consideration will be given to projects with multiple organizations partnering together to create a greater impact on the South Carolina specialty crop industry.

D. GRANT FUNDING PERIOD

Projects funded by the SCBGP may be 1, 2, or 3 years in length, but must be completed within three years. SCDA will fund projects for this RFA between **September 30**,

2025, and September 29, 2028. Upon notification of inclusion in the accepted State Plan, pre-award costs are allowable if necessary for efficient and timely performance of the scope of the project work up to 90 calendar days prior to the start date without prior approval. All costs incurred before USDA makes the award to SCDA are at the applicant's risk. The incurrence of pre-award costs in anticipation of an award imposes no obligation on SCDA to award funds for such costs.

E. FUNDING PARAMETERS

Projects may be funded at varying levels, depending on the nature of the project. SCDA reserves the right to alter project budgets as needed, prior to the award process. All projects must demonstrate strong justification for the requested budget, as well as the potential for providing significant demonstrable benefits to South Carolina specialty crops.

All SCBGP sub-awards are subject to the most current version of the USDA [AMS General 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 and in the official Request for Applications announced by USDA AMS.

SCDA reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals submitted. SCDA is under no legal or other obligation to execute a grant on the basis of a response submitted to this RFA. SCDA shall not pay for any costs incurred by any entity in responding to this RFA.

F. PROJECT TYPES

USDA AMS encourages each state department of agriculture to develop projects to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops pertaining to the following issues affecting the specialty crop industry:

- Enhancing food safety
- Developing new and improved seed varieties and specialty crops
- Improving the capacity of all entities in the specialty crop distribution chain to comply with the requirements of the Food Safety Modernization Act, for example, 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
- Pest and disease control
- Increasing child and adult nutrition knowledge and consumption of specialty crops
- Improving efficiency and reducing costs of distribution systems
- Sustainability

PROJECTS MORE RELEVANT FOR OTHER FEDERAL GRANT PROGRAMS

Projects that support the increase in sales of fruits and vegetables in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) by providing incentives at the point of purchase and/or including technologies for benefit redemption systems, should consider submitting those projects to the **Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Grants Program**.

Projects that support domestic farmers' markets, roadside stands, community-supported agriculture programs, agritourism activities, other direct producer-to-consumer market opportunities, as well as local and regional food business enterprises that process, distribute, aggregate, or store locally or regionally produced food products, should consider submitting those projects to the **Farmers Market Promotion Program** and/or the **Local Food Promotion Program**.

Projects that support bio-based products and bioenergy and energy programs, including biofuels, and other alternative uses for agricultural and forestry commodities (development of bio-based products), should see the USDA energy website at usda.gov/energy/matrix/home for information on how to submit those projects for consideration to the energy programs supported by the USDA.

PART II: GRANTEE INFORMATION

A. RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Each project included in the 2025 SCDA State Plan is referred to as a “grantee” and/or a “subrecipient.”

The subrecipient has full responsibility for the conduct of the project and for the timely reporting of achieved results. Each sub-recipient shall monitor the day-to-day performance of the grant project to assure adherence to statutes, regulations, and grant terms and conditions. The

subrecipient will carry out the activities described in the scope of work to achieve project goals, objectives, and desired outcomes.

The subrecipient will be accountable for all grant funds, ensuring all funds are used solely for authorized purposes. Accepted projects will receive funding on a cost-reimbursement basis only.

The subrecipients will ensure by written agreement:

- Funds will be used only for activities covered by the approved project plan
- Funds will not be used in violation of any restrictions and/or prohibitions of applicable statutes
- All budget and performance reports will be completed and submitted in a timely manner
- All project records will be kept for three years upon close-out of the award by SCDA
- An adequate accounting system is in place with good internal controls to ensure expenditures and reimbursements are reported accurately from all funding sources related to the project

All subrecipients are required by USDA AMS to have a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number. On April 4, 2022, the federal government stopped using the DUNS Number to uniquely identify entities. Now, entities doing business with the federal government use the Unique Entity ID created in SAM.gov. If your entity is registered in SAM.gov, your Unique Entity ID has already been assigned and is viewable in SAM.gov. To learn how to view your Unique Entity ID, [go to this help article.](#)

B. RISK ASSESSMENT

Each organization applying for the SCDA SCBGP will undergo a risk assessment evaluation. In accordance with 2 CFR 200.331, SCDA must determine the ability of the subrecipient to comply with Federal statutes, regulations, and the terms and conditions of the sub-award agreement. All subrecipients will complete a Financial Capability Questionnaire as part of this risk assessment and application process. Other factors include:

1. SCDA prior experience with subrecipient (i.e., on-time reports, accurate invoicing, communication)
2. Results of previous site visits or audits
3. New or frequently changing personnel and/or substantially changed internal control systems
4. Extent and results of any prior Federal awarding

agency monitoring, debarment, suspension, or delinquency on Federal debt

Organizations deemed at-risk by SCDA may still receive SCBGP sub-awards. However, SCDA is authorized to impose special conditions on high-risk subrecipients as listed in 2 CFR 200.207. Examples of special conditions may include additional measures for project monitoring, and/or more detailed or frequent financial reporting.

C. SELECTION CRITERIA

Only the required application template in its original format will be accepted. Each application will be reviewed for completeness and eligibility. Applications will be scored using the following criteria (a complete rubric may be downloaded at scspecialtycropblockgrant.com.)

1. **Project Partner and Summary** (15 points) – Does the project describe a specific and existing issue or need? Is it relevant to and will it provide a direct benefit to the South Carolina specialty crop industry?
2. **Project Purpose and Plan** (25 points) – Does the application provide a clear, viable, and well-conceived overall methodology for fulfilling the goals and objectives of the proposed project?
3. **External Support** (20 points) – Does the project demonstrate support from external stakeholders, and does it include letters of support?
4. **Measurable Outcomes** (15 points) – Are the objectives precise, attainable, and meet the purpose of the grant program to significantly benefit stakeholders? Have the AMS guidelines for selecting Outcomes/Indicators been followed and are they well-selected for the overall project objectives?
5. **Budget** (15 points) – Does the budget narrative and justification give a sufficient description of each category? Is the overall budget sufficiently detailed and consistent with the size/scope of the project?
6. **Overall Application** (10 points) – Were application instructions adhered to? Does the overall application present a clear, focused, and viable plan to increase the competitiveness of South Carolina specialty crops in a well-written manner?

The application 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. SCDA will not award grant funds for projects that solely benefit a particular commercial product or provide a profit

to a single organization, institution, or individual. In addition, sub-recipients cannot use grant funds to compete unfairly with private companies that provide equivalent products or services. Single organizations, institutions, and individuals are encouraged to participate together as project partners.

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

Research projects should be applied research and all results should be available to producers, processors and/or consumers within one to two years of the ending date of the grant. Projects with a large research component will be evaluated on their ability to document and transfer results to industry stakeholders.

SCDA may choose to use a portion of the funds for internally conducted projects, including but not limited to, outreach activities, regulatory and/or marketing activities, and trainings. All internal projects will also be evaluated in the competitive review process.

D. PERFORMANCE MEASURES

AMS is required to report the outcomes of the SCBGP on a national scale to demonstrate the performance of this program. To fulfill this requirement, AMS collaborated with stakeholders, including the federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB), to develop a list of measurable outcomes and indicators that quantifiably measure performance toward fulfilling the program's purpose to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. By collecting, aggregating, and reporting performance data across all states and territories, AMS can share the impact of the SCBGP with all stakeholders, including OMB, the U.S. Congress, the agricultural community, and the general public.

Each project application submitted to the SCDA for consideration as part of the State Plan must include at least one of the seven outcomes listed in the FY25 SCDA SCBGP Application Template. At least one of the indicators listed within the selected outcome(s) must also be selected. Subrecipients must report on the progress of the selected outcomes and indicators in the Annual Performance Report(s), and end-of-project results must be reported in the Final Performance Report. (This is discussed in more detail in Section III. C.)

E. BUDGET DEVELOPMENT

All SCBGP awards are subject to the most recent Federal 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, allocable, and reasonable in accordance with the Federal cost principles outlined in 2 CFR part 200 Subpart E. Applicants must acknowledge reading of the complete list of specific funding restrictions for the SCBGP which may be found in the [AMS General Terms and Conditions](#).

Subrecipients must adhere to the State of South Carolina Procurement Code for all purchases, contracts, travel, and personnel costs (per diem, meals) being paid with SCBGP funds.

General-purpose equipment purchases are not allowed for the SCBGP. Special purpose equipment deemed crucial to the success of the project may be applied for as Supplies accompanied by a detailed justification.

Subrecipients are not eligible to receive indirect costs through the SCDA SCBGP. The 8% administrative costs allowed by AMS are to be retained by SCDA to encumber administrative expenses incurred by SCDA for operating the SCBGP.

F. AWARD NOTIFICATION

Each organization whose application is reviewed in the competitive process will receive written correspondence from SCDA regarding the acceptance or non-acceptance of the project as part of the State Plan. Accepted projects may be requested to provide additional information or to make adjustments to their proposal. SCDA will notify each project lead regarding the status of the application by April 25, 2025.

SCDA reserves the right to alter, amend, or clarify any provisions, terms, or conditions of this program or any grant awarded as a result thereof, or to terminate this program at any time prior to the execution of an agreement, should SCDA deem any such action to be in the best interest of SCDA and of the State of South Carolina. The decision of SCDA will be administratively final in this regard.

The applicant is required to disclose any existing or potential conflicts of interest relative to this grant program. Failure to disclose any such relationship may result in the applicant's disqualification or termination of the agreement.

G. PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

Subrecipients must comply with both AMS and SCDA reporting requirements and financial procedures as outlined in the Grant Agreement which shall be signed by both the subrecipient and SCDA officials upon acknowledgment of funding. Any delegation by the subrecipient to a subcontractor regarding any duties and responsibilities imposed by the grant award must be approved in advance by SCDA and shall not relieve the subrecipient of its responsibilities to SCDA for their performance.

Subrecipients must remain in full compliance with State and Federal laws and regulations. Non-compliance may result in termination of the grant or ineligibility for reimbursement of expenses. Each subrecipient must ensure they have an adequate accounting system in place and good internal controls to ensure expenditures and reimbursements are reported and maintained for a minimum of three years after the conclusion of the project.

Reporting requirements are project-specific and based on the duration of each project. By signing the Grant Agreement, the subrecipient agrees to all accountability and reporting requirements. Subrecipients must show both a strong progress of work completed on all programmatic and financial progress by submitting yearly memo updates. Subrecipients will be required to submit Annual Performance Report(s); one for each fiscal year of the project, and a Final Performance Report which is inclusive for all three years, or the total duration of the project, whichever comes first. Failure to comply with reporting requirements may result in the withholding of a request for reimbursement and/or termination of the award and may also impact ability to receive future funding.

Subrecipients will be required to submit payment requests at least quarterly, but no more frequently than monthly. Payment requests must include sufficient detail and supporting documentation. Backup detail may include, but is not limited to, documentation of personnel expenses, or copies of invoices and receipts. All reimbursement requests including Supplies must be accompanied by proof of payment (receipt or zero balance paid invoice) which clearly details the item(s) purchased.

Up to 90% of the total grant award may be paid provided the work for which payment is requested has been completed and proper documentation has been submitted. The remaining 10% may only be disbursed once all reporting requirements have been met, including the approved Final Performance Report.

PART III: APPLICATION INFORMATION

A. SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

All proposed applications must be received by **11:59 pm, Friday, February 14, 2025**, to be considered. Applications will only be accepted via email to scbgp@scda.sc.gov. Each applicant is required by SCDA and AMS to have a current and active Unique Entity Identification (UEI) number which can be obtained at [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov).

B. PROJECT APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

The South Carolina State Plan which will be submitted to USDA AMS for consideration will include a series of project profiles that detail the necessary information to fulfill the goals and objectives of each project. Applicants must use the provided SCDA FY2025 SCBGP Application Template to be considered. The official application template may be obtained at the following link: scspecialtycropblockgrant.com.

The Application Template was updated in 2022, but no changes were made for FY2025. Please pay close attention to all italicized instructions in the project profile template. Furthermore, please do not alter or remove any portions of the template, and be sure to include an answer for every question, even if the answer is “Not Applicable.”

C. EXPECTED MEASURABLE OUTCOMES/ PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS

The FY2025 Application Template includes the full revision of the Performance Measures made in 2022. Reporting the measurable outcomes and determining methods of evaluating these outcomes have been aggregated into seven categories by AMS. As previously stated, USDA will use the data from each of these seven outcome measures to demonstrate the performance of the program to all stakeholders, including the OMB, the U.S. Congress, the agricultural community, and the general public.

Each project submitted to the SCDA SCBGP must include **at least one of the seven outcomes** listed below, except by special request. Additionally, **at least one of the indicators** listed underneath the selected outcome(s) must be chosen. If there are multiple sub-indicators under the selected indicator, select **at least one**.

If the indicator(s) below the selected outcome(s) are not relevant to a project, a project-specific indicator(s) may be

developed which will be subject to approval by AMS. Include the proposed indicator under the Miscellaneous Outcome Measure section of the Project Application Template.

Note: The *progress* of each indicator must be reported in the Annual Performance Report(s) and the *result* must be reported in the Final Performance Report. This should be carefully considered in the number of outcomes/indicators selected so as not to create a burdensome reporting situation. **It is highly advisable to limit the project to 1–3 total indicators.**

OUTCOME MEASURES

Outcome 1: Increasing Consumption and Consumer Purchasing of Specialty Crops

1.1 Total number of consumers who gained knowledge about specialty crops.

1.1a Adults.

1.1b Children.

1.2 Total number of consumers who consumed more specialty crops.

1.2a Adults.

1.2b Children.

1.3 Number of additional specialty crop customers counted.

1.4 Number of additional business transactions executed.

1.5 Increased sales measured in:

1.5a Dollars.

1.5b Percent change.

1.5c Combination of volume and average price as a result of enhanced marketing activities.

Outcome 2: Increasing Access to Specialty Crops and Expanding Specialty Crop Production & Distribution

2.1 Number of stakeholders that gained technical knowledge about producing, preparing, procuring, and/or accessing specialty crops.

2.2 Number of stakeholders that reported producing, preparing, procuring, and/or accessing more specialty crops.

2.3 Total number of market access points for specialty crops developed or expanded. Of those:

2.3a Number of new online portals created to sell specialty crops.

2.3b Number with expanded seasonal availability.

2.3c Number of existing market access points that expanded specialty crop offerings.

2.3d Number of new market access points that established specialty crop offerings.

2.4 Number of stakeholders that gained knowledge about more efficient and effective distribution systems.

2.5 Number of stakeholders that adopted best practices or new technologies to improve distribution systems.

2.6 Total number of partnerships established between producers, distributors, and/or other relevant intermediaries related to distribution systems. Of those established:

2.6a Number formalized with written agreements (i.e., MOU's, signed contracts, etc.).

2.6b Number of partnerships with underserved organizations.

2.7 Total number of new/improved distribution systems developed. Of those, the number that:

2.7a Stemmed from new partnerships.

2.7b Increased efficiency.

2.7c Reduced costs.

2.7d Increased specialty crop grower participation.

2.7e Expanded customer reach.

2.7f Increased online presence.

2.8 Number of specialty crop-related jobs:

2.8a Created.

2.8b Maintained.

2.9 Total number of new individuals who went into specialty crop production as a result of marketing. Of those, the number who are:

2.9a Beginning farmers or ranchers.

2.9b Socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers.

2.10 Number of market access points that reported increased:

2.10a Revenue.

2.10b Sales.

2.10c Cost-savings.

Outcome 3: Increase Food Safety Knowledge and Processes

3.1 Number of stakeholders that gained knowledge about prevention, detection, control, and/or intervention food safety practices, including relevant regulations (to improve their ability to comply with the Food Safety Modernization

Act (FSMA) and/or meet the standards for aligned third-party food safety audits such as Harmonized GAP/GHP.

3.2 Number of stakeholders that:

3.2a Established a food safety plan.

3.2b Revised or updated their food safety plan.

3.3 Number of specialty crop stakeholders who implemented new/improved prevention, detection, control, and intervention practices, tools, or technologies to mitigate food safety risks (to improve their ability to comply with the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) and/or meet the standards for aligned third-party food safety audits such as Harmonized GAP/GHP).

3.4 Number of preventions, detection, control, or intervention practices developed or enhanced to mitigate food safety risk.

3.5 Number of stakeholders that used grant funds to:

3.5a Purchase

3.5b Upgrade food safety equipment

Outcome 4: Improve Pest and Disease Control Processes

4.1 Number of stakeholders that gained knowledge about science-based tools to combat pests and diseases.

4.2 Number of stakeholders that adopted pest and disease control best practices, technologies, or innovations.

4.3 Number of stakeholders trained in early detection and rapid response practices to combat pests and disease.

Of those:

4.3a Number of additional acres managed using integrated pest management

4.4 Number of stakeholders that implemented new diagnostic systems, methods, or technologies for analyzing specialty crop pests and diseases.

4.5 Total number of producers/processors that enhanced or maintained pest and disease control practices. Of those:

4.5a Reduction in product lost to pests and diseases.

4.5b Improved crop quality.

4.5c Reduction in labor costs.

4.5d Reduction in pesticide use

4.6 Number of producers/processors improving the efficiency of pest and disease control diagnostics and response testing, as reported by:

4.6a Improving speed.

4.6b Improving reliability.

4.6c Expanding capability.

4.6d Increasing testing (i.e. survey work for pests)

Outcome 5: Develop New Seed Varieties and Specialty Crops

5.1 Number of cultivars and/or variety trials conducted.

Of those:

5.1a Number that advanced to further stages of development.

5.2 Number of cultivars and/or seed varieties developed.

5.3 Number of cultivars and/or seed varieties released.

5.4 Number of growers adopting new cultivars and/or varieties.

5.5 Number of acres planted with new cultivars and/or varieties.

Outcome 6: Expand Specialty Crop Research and Development

6.1 Number of research goals accomplished.

6.2 For research conclusions, the number that:

6.2a Yielded findings that supported continued research.

6.2b Yielded findings that led to completion of study.

6.2c Yielded findings that allow for implementation of new practice, process, or technology.

6.3 Number of industry representatives and other stakeholders who engaged with research results.

6.4 Total number of research outputs published to industry publications and/or academic journals. For each published research output, the:

6.4a Number of views/reads of published research/data.

6.4b Number of citations counted.

Outcome 7: Improve Environmental Sustainability of Specialty Crops

7.1 Number of stakeholders that gained knowledge about environmental sustainability best practices, tools, or technologies.

7.2 Number of stakeholders reported with an intent to adopt environmental sustainability best practices, tools, or technologies.

7.3 Number of producers that adopted environmental best practices or tools.

7.4 Number of new tools/technologies developed or enhanced to improve sustainability/ conservation or other environmental outcomes.

7.5 Number of additional acres managed with sustainable practices, tools, or technologies that focused on:

7.5a Water quality/ conservation.

7.5b Soil health.

7.5c Biodiversity.

7.5d Reduction in energy use.

7.5e Other positive environmental outcomes (optional).

7.6 Number of additional acres established and maintained for the mutual benefit of pollinators/ specialty crops.