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STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBG)

Program Purpose

The sole purpose of the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) is to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. The Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) encourage organizations to develop projects to solely enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops pertaining to the following issues affecting the industry:

- Food Safety
- Marketing
- Nutrition
- Plant Health
- Value Added/Industry Development

Specialty crops are defined as fruits and vegetables, dried fruit, tree nuts, horticulture, and nursery crops (including floriculture). See [lists of eligible and ineligible crops](#) from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) website.

Proposals 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.

Eligibility

Applications will **only** be accepted from producer, industry or community-based organizations involved with, or that promote specialty crops.

- Projects must demonstrate that they enhance the competitiveness of Michigan's specialty crop industry.
- Project funds may only be used for activities benefiting specialty crops.
- Grant funds will not be awarded for projects that directly benefit or provide a profit to a single organization, institution or individual. Applications will not be accepted where the primary applicant is an educational institution.

Producer, industry or community-based organizations involved with specialty crops may partner with an educational institution; however, the primary applicant must be a producer, industry or community-based organizations involved with specialty crops.

What is an eligible specialty crop?

Specialty crops are defined in law as “fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits and horticulture and nursery crops, including floriculture.” You can access information concerning the definition of specialty crops and a listing of eligible specialty crops on USDA’s website or by clicking: [Definition of Specialty Crops](#).

How does the program work?

Interested applicants must submit a proposal to MDARD following the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program guidelines provided. Proposals will be reviewed and preliminarily selected for inclusion in MDARD’s state plan to USDA - AMS. The State Plan is submitted to USDA for review and final approval to award funds to selected projects. For information on the background of the program, state allocations or other USDA administration questions, please see [USDA’s Specialty Crop](#) website.

How do I apply?

Interested persons can visit MDARD’s website at www.michigan.gov/mdard and download a copy of the application, the Request for Proposals (RFP), and other program information. Completed applications should be submitted electronically to the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development as instructed in the application.

What happens after I apply?

An administrative review will occur to determine whether the applicant is responsive to the requirements set forth in the RFP and guidance documents. Proposals will then be reviewed and evaluated by a Joint Evaluation Committee. Recommendations are then sent to the MDARD Director for final review and approval. Once approved by the Director the State Plan is submitted to USDA-AMS for review and approval. Once USDA approves the State Plan, MDARD will issue grant agreements to the selected applicants.

What is a state plan?

The state plan is a compilation of all proposal selected by MDARD to be funded by the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program.

What happens during USDA’s review?

USDA reviews all proposals provided in the state plan to ensure all required information has been provided, that the proposal meets the intent of the program, and the each project has a clear measurable objective. USDA may ask for revisions to project proposals if information is missing or unclear.

Are there a minimum or maximum numbers of pages allowed?

The Project Proposal is limited to 10 pages. This does NOT include the Application Coversheet, or other allowable attachments such as letters of support. The proposal must be written in TIMES NEW ROMAN size 12 font, with 1-inch margins.

When will funds be available?

MDARD does not have a specific date from USDA, but we are anticipating being able to award funds in October.

Does the proposal need to follow *exactly* the outline specified in the Application Guidelines, or are those categories just suggestions?

Proposals need to contain the exact categories specified in the RFP, Application and Guidance documents. MDARD's application to USDA is required to contain these specific categories for each project funded through the SCBGP. Additional documents such as letters of commitment from project partners may also be attached.

PROJECT NARRATIVE

Can a project that promotes Michigan specialty crop products include ineligible products or commodities?

Yes, projects may also benefit ineligible products or commodities; however, applicants must describe, in detail, what steps and measures will be taken to ensure that all SCBGP funding will be used to solely enhance the competitiveness of eligible Michigan specialty crops.

What is the difference between an output and an outcome in the Expected Measurable Outcomes Section?

Outputs refers to the number of tangible results you would gain from the completion of the project such as the number of participants at a conference, the number of marketing advertisements published, etc. Outcomes are what you expect to gain as a result of the project and are of direct benefit to the specialty crop stakeholder listed in the potential impact section, such as percent increase of knowledge gained from educational materials presented at a conference or increase in sales due to the advertisements.

Outputs: The direct results of the activities that will be conducted. They are products, goods, or services that applicants (or partners) create or deliver during the course of the grant. Output statements usually, but not always, include a "who" or "what" that will receive the product, good or service.

Outcomes: The impacts or changes that will be achieved through the outputs. An outcome is a level of performance or achievement. Outcome statements should state clearly who or what will change (if the proposed work is successful), and by when.

What does Performance Monitoring in the Expected Measurable Outcomes Section mean?

The Performance Monitoring Plan describes the means by which an applicant will plan for and evaluate the success of implementing project activities.

What should be included in the Work Plan?

The work plan should be an outline that provides details about key activities that will be accomplished. Be sure to include performance monitoring and data collection in the work plan.

Can the outcome of a research project be beyond the timeline of the grant?

Yes. MDARD understands that for many projects, it may take longer than one year to reach measurable outcomes. If proposing such a project, communicate what the anticipated outcomes will be by the end of the grant and a timeline for the expected end results of the project beyond the end of the grant. It will also be important to communicate HOW the project will be able to continue without the SCBGP funds at the end of the granting period.

What dates should be included in the timeline?

Although many activities will be conducted throughout the life of the project, others may be scheduled for a shorter timeframe such as one to three months. Be sure to breakout key activities and allocate sufficient time to each.

Can a project begin at any time as long as it is within the grant period?

Yes, a project can begin at any time during the grant period, but must not begin before a signed grant agreement is in place.

Are Resumes/Curriculum Vitaes required?

No, Resumes/Curriculum Vitaes do not need to be included with the application package.

Is there a limit to the number of Letters of Support (LOS) that can be attached?

Who should write Letters of Support? To whom and at what address should Letters of Support be addressed?

Letters of Support (LOS) are not required as part of the application. There is not a limit to the number of LOS that can be attached. LOS should come from businesses, organizations or associations that believe the proposed project will be beneficial to the specialty crop industry. LOS should be addressed and sent to the Grant Proposal applicant to be included as part of their application submitted to MDARD.

Is the number of Letters of Support part of the Grant Proposal scoring criteria?

No, the number of Letters of Support is not part of the Grant Proposal scoring criteria; however, the level of support the project demonstrates with a letter of support is considered part of the scoring criteria.

BUDGET NARRATIVE

How detailed does the Contractual section of the Budget Narrative need to be?

For each Contractor or Consultant, a short description of the type of services and general categories of items such as professional services, travel, indirect, etc. must be detailed as indicated on the Budget Narrative.

Should Matching Funds and/or In-Kind contributions be included on the Grant Proposal Budget or Budget Narrative?

Matching funds and/or In-Kind contributions are not a requirement of the Michigan SCBGP, however, if you choose to include Matching Funds and/or In-Kind contributions, only activities supported by the SCBGP grant funds should be included in the Budget and Budget Narrative.

Other Project Related Information:

For Research Projects be sure the Project Commitment section demonstrates the project has the support of specialty crop stakeholders outside the lead organization and the Work Plan and Expected Measurable Outcomes sections of the proposal demonstrate benefit to the specialty crop industry through dissemination of project results and other outreach to the industry.

For General Marketing Projects/Buy Local Projects/Farmers' Market Promotional Projects, be sure the project proposal clearly demonstrates how funds will be used to SOLELY enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops, rather than the farmers' market itself, a specific local brand, etc. In addition, note that promotional items must promote specialty crops rather than the farmers' market or buy local brand.

For Sponsorship Programs/Expenses, be mindful that the costs associated with sponsorships are considered to be a contribution or donation, which are unallowable costs in the grant. Additionally, sponsorships only benefit the organization offering the money. This limits the beneficiaries to the sponsor organization, which conflicts with the restriction that projects affect and produce measurable outcomes for the specialty crop industry and/or the public rather than a single organization, institution, or individual.

Projects that include a value added product: make sure the product consists of more than 50 percent of the specialty crop by weight, exclusive of added water.

Can I contact MDARD for further clarification?

Yes, MDARD's Grants office can provide assistance in the preparation of proposal budgets and the completion of agency forms. Please contact MDA-grants@michigan.gov.