



## Vermont Specialty Crop Block Grant Program

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### *FY 2014 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS*

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFMM) announces the availability of grant funds for the sole purpose of enhancing the competitiveness of Vermont-grown specialty crops.

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## I. OVERVIEW

### A. Funding Source and Available Funds

USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) distributes block grant funds annually, which are administered by state departments of agriculture to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. AMS has announced 2014 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) funding, and VAAFM will be granting out approximately \$200,000.00 during this funding cycle.

Specialty crops are defined as fruits and vegetables, dried fruit, tree nuts, and nursery crops (including floriculture and turf production). The USDA maintains a list of eligible specialty crops on its website: [www.ams.usda.gov/scbgp](http://www.ams.usda.gov/scbgp). AMS encourages projects that enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops, sustain the livelihoods of American farmers, and strengthen local economies.

### B. Eligibility and Program Goals

A follow-up proposal is allowed only after the original Specialty Crop Block Grant project has been completed, and the final report has been submitted to and accepted by USDA. A follow-up proposal to an in-progress Specialty Crop Block Grant project is not allowed.

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets has identified the following program goals and funding priorities for 2014:

#### Goals:

- Farm profitability
- Statewide economic impact
- Sustainability

#### Funding Priorities:

- Food safety and traceability
- Market access, branding and consumer education (local, regional, national, international)
- Supply chain development
- Pest and disease management
- Productivity enhancement, cost containment and innovation
- Organizational development

Vermont SCBGP funds will be distributed to the specialty crop industry through a competitive review process. Projects may be up to three calendar years in length, and multi-year projects are encouraged. At least 50% of grant funds will be allocated to projects between 18 and 36 months in duration. Although there is no specific cap on grant amounts, successful proposals in previous years have been generally between \$10,000 and \$30,000 per project year. In addition, grants must follow USDA guidelines for eligible spending. Guidelines are available at: [www.ams.usda.gov/scbgp](http://www.ams.usda.gov/scbgp).

Multi-state projects are encouraged to address challenges and opportunities that cross state boundaries. Projects that demonstrate innovative partnerships are also encouraged. Preference will be given to projects that have not received funding in the past, but applications that build on a

previously funded SCBGP project may be submitted. In such cases, the application should clearly indicate how the project complements previous work.

Applications for grant funds should show how the project impacts multiple businesses in the supply chain and/or produces measurable outcomes for the specialty crop industry, rather than a single organization, institution, or individual. The following are some examples of acceptable and unacceptable projects:

#### Examples of Unacceptable Projects

- A company requests grant funds to purchase starter plants or equipment used to plant, cultivate, and grow a specialty crop for the purpose of making a profit, or to expand production of a single business.
- Requests by individual specialty crop businesses or roadside stands to promote their individual business.

#### Examples of Acceptable Projects

- A producer group or university submits a proposal to conduct research on the feasibility of planting, cultivating, and growing a specialty crop in a particular area, the results of which can be shared with many growers throughout the State.
- An organization requests grant funds to help improve and expand new markets which benefit a wide array of specialty crop producers.

### **C. Match**

All projects must show matching funds representing 50% of the grant request. For instance, for a grant request of \$10,000, applicant must demonstrate at least \$5,000 in match. At least half of match funds must be cash match. Under limited circumstances, match requirements may be reduced or waived for projects that can justify the need for a reduced match. Waiver requests must outline the impact of the project and indicate any special circumstances that justify this consideration.

If a project runs the risk of benefiting non-specialty crop industries (i.e. grain, livestock, or dairy) match it must be clear how you have determined the match will cover the appropriate percentage of non-specialty crop industries.

For example; a project promotes specialty crops at a Farmers Market. Non-specialty crop vendors account for 40% of the vendors at the specific Farmers Market, therefore your 50% match will be adequate to account for any benefit those vendors could gain from the proposed project.

### **D. Review Process**

A committee of at least five people, including at least two farmers, will review all grants and make recommendations to VAAF, who will make the final recommendations to the Secretary of Agriculture on all grant awards.

Vermont SCBGP Application Guidance

Section 1: Overview

All applicants are required to submit a **MANDATORY** letter of intent to VAAFMM by March 28. Please read the scoring criteria (page 15) carefully to ensure that your application addresses the areas that will be evaluated by the review committee. Instructions for submitting your LOI is provided in Section II below. Projects with the highest ranking LOIs will be asked to submit a full application.

The full application instructions, format, and scoring criteria are provided in Sections III, IV, and V below.

Applicants with previous participation that have incomplete or unsatisfactory performance may be ruled ineligible for participation at the sole discretion of VAAFMM.

<b>KEY DATES</b>
March 28, 2014: LOI due by 4:30 (mandatory)
April 18, 2014: LOI feedback returned to applicants
May 19, 2014: Full applications due by 4:30 (for those who have been invited to apply only)
June 16, 2014: Final decisions made
June 30, 2014: State plan submitted to USDA (some adjustments to projects may be required by AMS at this point)
September 30, 2014: Funds disbursed from USDA (exact date TBA)

## II. WHAT'S NEW THIS YEAR

### NEW THIS YEAR

#### General

- The request for applications has a different look this year because we followed the Office of Management and Budget standard format for Federal agency announcements of funding opportunities ([68 FR 37370](#))
- Approximately \$67 million is available this year
- The block grant formula changed to base grant allocations on the average of the most recent available value of specialty crop cash receipts in the State and the acreage of specialty crop production in the State

#### Eligibility Information

- We encourage you to give priority to projects that have the potential to provide solutions that lead to measurable benefits to specialty crop growers and consumers
- We will not award funds to an entity to provide or sell specialty crop products or services for a fee where the entity is competing unfairly with private companies that provide equivalent products or services
- We encourage you to prioritize and further expand funding to projects that are supported by and address the needs of U.S. specialty crop growers
- We will not award funds for projects where one organization specifically attempts to disparage the mission, goals, and/or actions of another organization
- If matching funds are proposed as a mechanism to ensure all grant funds will solely enhance the competitiveness of eligible specialty crops, the recipient must keep adequate records to identify and document the specific costs or contributions proposed to meet the match or cost-share, the source of funding or contributions, and document how the valuation was determined

#### Application and Submission Information

- We no longer require the SF-424A – Budget Information form
- We implemented an optional template for State department of Agriculture Grant Administration - regardless of whether you use the template, each year of grant administration must be budgeted. This was previously sent to all states
- We implemented an optional project profile template. This was previously sent to all states
- A separate section for multi-state projects was eliminated – we now ask, if applicable, how the project will have a multi-state or national impact under the Potential Impact section
- Under Expected Measurable Outcomes, we ask how the results of the project will be shared with specialty crop growers and other interested parties

- We eliminated the project oversight section, however it is still important that you understand how each of your subrecipients is monitoring the project performance and funding
- The contractor/consultant hourly rate cap was changed to not exceed the salary of a GS-15 step 10 Federal employee in your area

### **Limit on Administration Costs**

Administration costs are defined as indirect costs and are limited to 8 percent of the total Federal funds provided under the award. Indirect costs requested by sub-applicants plus indirect administration costs requested by the State department of agriculture must not exceed 8 percent of the state's grant allocation. Indirect costs charged to any individual project must not exceed 8 percent of that project's budget. We include additional guidance for you on presenting direct and indirect costs consistently.

### **Funding Restrictions**

Advertising and public relations costs used to solely promote the image of an organization, general logo, or general brand, rather than specialty crops, is unallowable.

- A promotional campaign to increase sales of "XYZ Grown" Watermelon is acceptable while increasing brand awareness of "XYZ Grown" generically is not.
- Promoting tomatoes while including an organization's logo in the promotion is acceptable, while generally promoting an organization's logo is not.
- Promotional items could say "Buy XYZ Grown Apples" but not "XYZ Grown", which promotes XYZ generically.
- A promotional campaign to increase producer sales of "XYZ Grown fruits and vegetables" is acceptable while increasing membership in "XYZ Grown" generically is not.

Grant funds cannot be used for coupon/incentive redemptions or price discounts. Costs associated with printing, distribution, or promotion of coupons/tokens or price discounts (i.e., a print advertisement that contains a clip-out coupon) are allowable only if they solely promote the specialty crop rather than promote or benefit a program or single organization

**Grant funds cannot be used for costs associated with the use of trade shows, meeting rooms, displays, demonstrations, exhibits, and the rental of space for activities that do not solely promote specialty crops.**

Aquaponics is allowable as long as the crops that are being grown are eligible specialty crops and the focus of the project is on the specialty crops and not the fish.

- A project to determine whether carp, catfish, or tilapia are best for growing lettuce is acceptable.
- A project to study whether lettuce or tomato produced the highest yield of tilapia is not acceptable.
- A project to farm fish using an aquaponics system and then sell the fish is not acceptable.

- A project to grow specialty crops where both the specialty crops and the fish are sold is not acceptable.

### **Post-Award**

We updated the [SCBGP General Award Terms and Conditions](#) to be more comprehensive. We will be providing training on the terms and conditions in the fall of 2014.

## **III. LETTER OF INTENT (LOI) Instructions**

**Letter of intent must be received electronically at <http://bit.ly/1czYFZ> to the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets by 4:30 PM on Friday MARCH 28, 2014.**

1. Review the entire 2014 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program guidance document.
2. Draft responses for the LOI in Microsoft Word document and be prepared to enter your responses electronically at <http://bit.ly/1czYFZ>. LOI questions are outlined below.
3. Prepare and attach the one-page **Budget Sheet**, showing budget categories and describing the sources of match funds. Be sure to show the required matching funds (50% of total grant request, half of which must be cash).
4. LOI must be submitted electronically at <http://bit.ly/1czYFZ> by 4:30 pm on March 28, 2014.

Please be sure to review the scoring criteria in Section IV (p. 15) before completing your LOI. After reviewing LOIs, the top-ranking projects will be asked to submit a full application.

### **1. Applicant Information**

Please be ready to provide the following information:

- Project title.
- Date, name, name of business or organization, phone number, email address, and lead applicant affiliation.
- Which Specialty Crop Industries will your project promote? (Please list all that apply)
- Which state priorities will your project address? (Please list all that apply)

### **2. Proposal Summary**

Keeping in mind the goals and priorities listed in Section I and the scoring criteria in Section IV, please provide a concise project summary (maximum 1,000 words) that addresses the following points:

- The need your project is addressing
- Outcomes expected as a result of this project and how outcomes will be measured (describe impact on the supply chain or specialty crops industry)
- Project duration (up to 3 years)
- Has this project been funded previously? If so, what is the sustainability plan?

- How does this project demonstrate or promote innovation?

### 3. Project Budget (estimated)

Be prepared to enter the following:

- Specialty Crop Block Grant request,
- Match funds
- Total project budget (including match).

Be prepared to attach a project budget in a table (excel is preferred) using the template below. Please tell us the overall estimated budget for this project, including funding from other sources, using the template below. In this section, indicate any intent to apply for a waiver request.

CATEGORY	SCBGP REQUEST	MATCH (include source)	TOTAL
Personnel			
Fringe Benefits			
Travel			
Equipment			
Supplies			
Contractual			
Other			
TOTAL			

#### **\*REMINDER\***

If a project runs the risk of benefiting non-specialty crop industries (i.e. grain, livestock, or dairy), match it must be clear how you have determined the match will cover the appropriate percentage of non-specialty crop industries.

For example; a project promotes specialty crops at a Farmers Market. Non-specialty crop vendors account for 40% of the vendors at the specific Farmers Market, therefore your 50% match will be adequate to account for any benefit those vendors could gain from the proposed project.

### 4. Partner Organizations

List all partner organizations that are formally participating with you in this project. If you are the only formally participating organization, write "N/A".

#### IV. APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

**Application proposals must be received electronically at <http://bit.ly/1heUEJC> to the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets by 4:30 PM on Monday, May 19, 2014.**

1. Review the entire 2014 Specialty Crop Block Grant Program guidance document.
2. The first page of the link will collect all necessary applicant information equivalent to the cover sheet used in past grant rounds.
3. Copy and paste your abstract into the space provided. For project tracking purposes we ask that you provide your abstract into the form as well as having it in your final submitted proposal.
4. Prepare and attach your full project proposal. Project proposals should have all the components outlined in this section including the budget.
5. Secure and attach *at least* one letter of support from a partner organization or specialty crop industry producer.
6. Application must be submitted electronically at <http://bit.ly/1heUEJC> by 4:30 pm on May 19, 2014.

Please be sure to review the scoring criteria in Section IV (p. 15) before completing your Application.

## V. APPLICATION FORMAT

### Page 1: Applicant Information

Please be ready to provide the following information:

- Project title, DUNS number, and business or organization.
- Date, contact name, contact title, address, phone, email, and lead applicant affiliation.
- Which Specialty Crop Industries will your project promote? (Please list all that apply)
- Which state priorities will your project address? (Please list all that apply)

### Page 2: Project Proposal and Attachments

**Project Title** - (15 words or less)

**Abstract** - Include a project summary of 250 words or less suitable for dissemination to the public. It should include the need for the project, a brief description of the goals and outcomes, and your plan for evaluating and measuring the success of the project or program.

**Project Partner Organization** - Include the name of the applicant organization that will establish an agreement or contractual relationship with the State department of agriculture to lead and execute the project.

#### **Project Purpose**

- What is the specific issue, problem, or need that the project will address?
- Why is the project important and timely?
- What are the objectives of the project?
- If any of the project activities or costs has the potential to enhance the competitiveness of non-specialty crops (ex: farmers market, general buy local, CSA etc.) describe the methods or processes you will implement to verify all grant funds are expended on activities and costs that only enhance the competitiveness of eligible specialty crops. If you propose a cost-share or match to cover non-specialty crop activities and costs, include the specific costs or contributions proposed to meet the cost-share or match, the source of funding or contributions, and describe how you determined the appropriate amount of cost-share or match.
- If the project is a continuation of a project that the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) funded previously, describe how the project differs from and builds on the previous project's efforts. Describe also the likelihood of the project becoming self-sustaining and not indefinitely dependent on grant funds. Specifically, provide a summary (3 to 5 sentences per project) of the accomplishments of the previous project that have led you to seek continued funding.
- Have you submitted the project to another Federal or State grant program other than the SCBGP for funding and/or is another Federal or State grant program other than the SCBGP funding the project currently?
  - If no, indicate that you have not.

- If yes, identify the Federal and/or State grant program by name and describe how the new project differs from and supplements efforts of the SCBGP and the other Federal or State grant program rather than duplicates funding efforts. The SCBGP will not fund duplicative projects.

**Potential Impact** - This section must show how the project benefits the specialty crop industry and/or the public or multiple states rather than only a particular commercial product, single organization, institution, or individual.

- Who are the specialty crop beneficiaries of the project?
- How many specialty crop beneficiaries will the project benefit?
- How will the project benefit the specialty crop beneficiaries?
- What is the potential economic impact of the project if it can be estimated?
- If applicable, how will the project have a multi-state (benefitting two more or states) or national impact?

**Expected Measurable Outcomes** - Provide at least one distinct, quantifiable, measurable project outcome that solely supports enhancing the competitiveness of eligible specialty crops. If the outcome measures are long-term and occur after the project's completion, then identify an intermediate outcome that occurs before the end of the grant period and that is expected to help lead to the fulfillment of long-term outcomes. For further information on expected measurable outcomes, please see the [Outcomes Model](#) or this [Educational Bulletin](#). Steps to developing Outcome Measures can be found in Appendix A.

**GOAL(S)**

- A goal is what you hope to achieve as a result of conducting the activities and producing the outputs (tangible results that can be seen, touched, handled, or moved about) of the project. Examples of outcome-oriented goals could include a change in knowledge, change in behavior, or change in conditions that make a difference for the beneficiaries of the project.

**PERFORMANCE MEASURE(S):**

- Identify a performance measure for each goal that you will use to measure the actual project results compared to the expected results. These are usually expressed in quantifiable terms and should be objective and measurable (numeric values, percentages, scores and indices, although in certain circumstances qualitative measures are appropriate).

**BENCHMARK:**

- For each performance measure provided, include benchmark. The benchmark is the baseline data against which you will measure your success. Examples of a benchmark could include current or initial level of knowledge, current behavior, or current conditions.

**TARGET:**

- For each benchmark provided, indicate the TARGET. The TARGET is the level of change that you anticipate by the completion of the project. This is NOT the target audience or target population.

**PERFORMANCE MONITORING PLAN:**

- How will you monitor your progress toward achieving each GOAL?
- What are your data sources for monitoring performance? For example, will you conduct surveys or use questionnaires?
- How will you collect the required data? Be sure to include the frequency of your data collection.
- Describe how you will share the results of the project with specialty crop growers and other interested specialty crop stakeholders.

**Work Plan**

<p><b>Project Activity</b> - Describe the project activities that are necessary to accomplish the objectives. Make sure you include your performance monitoring/data collection activities.</p>	<p><b>Who will do the work?</b> Indicate the project participants who will do the work of each activity, including subrecipients, and/or contractors. If you request grant funds for personnel and contractors, you must include them in the work plan to demonstrate the requested funding is warranted. If you request funds for travel, these activities must also be included.</p>	<p><b>When will the activity be accomplished?</b> Include a timeline that indicates when each activity will occur (at least month and year) and beginning and end dates for the project. Make sure the work plan timeline shows that the project will be completed within the allowable grant period.</p>

**Project Commitment** - Describe the specialty crop stakeholders other than the applicant, individuals and organizations involved in the project who support this project and why.

**Budget Narrative**

All projects must show matching funds representing 50% of the grant request. For instance, for a grant request of \$10,000, the applicant must demonstrate at least \$5,000 in match. At least half of match funds must be cash match. The budget narrative should clearly show the federal funds that support the project. In the matching funds line, please do not commingle non-federal funds with federals in each budget section. To request a waiver to the match requirement, please submit a statement outlining program impact and special circumstances that justify this consideration (maximum 250 words).

All expenses described in this Budget Narrative must be associated with expenses that will be covered by the SCBGP.

<b><i>Budget Summary</i></b>
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Expense Category	Funds Requested
Personnel	
Fringe Benefits	
Travel	
Equipment	
Supplies	
Contractual	
Other	
<b>Total Budget</b>	

- **Personnel** - List the organization’s employees whose time and effort can be specifically identified and easily and accurately traced to project activities that solely enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops.

Name/Title	Level of Effort (# of hours OR % FTE)	Funds Requested
<b>Personnel Subtotal</b>		

- **Fringe Benefits** - Provide the fringe benefit rates for each of the project’s salaried employees described in the Personnel section that will be paid with SCBGP funds.

Name/Title	Fringe Benefit Rate	Funds Requested
<b>Fringe Subtotal</b>		

- **Travel** - Explain the purpose for each Trip Request. Please note that travel costs are limited to those allowed by formal organizational policy; in the case of air travel, project participants must use the lowest reasonable commercial airfares. For recipient organizations that have no formal travel policy and for-profit recipients, allowable travel costs may not exceed those established by the Federal Travel Regulation, issued by GSA, including the maximum per diem and subsistence rates prescribed in those regulations. This information is available at <http://www.gsa.gov>.

Trip Destination	Purpose of the Trip	Type of Expense (airfare, car rental, hotel, meals, mileage, etc.)	Unit of Measure (days, nights,	Number of Units	Cost per Unit	Number of Travelers Claiming the Expense	Funds Requested



sources. For all non-State applicants, please verify that the applicant used its own procurement procedures which reflect applicable State and local laws and regulations and conform to the Federal laws and standards identified in 7 CFR Part 3019.40 through 48 or 3016.36, as applicable.

- If a contractor/consultant has not yet been selected, provide an acknowledgement that the procurement processes have not yet been conducted and an assurance that the State applicant will follow the same policies and procedures it uses for procurements from its non-federal sources. For all non-State applicants, provide an acknowledgement that the procurement processes have not yet been conducted, and an assurance that the applicant will use its own procurement procedures which reflect applicable State and local laws and regulations and conform to the Federal law and standards identified in 7 CFR Part 3019.40 through 48 or 3016.36, as applicable.
- Provide an itemized budget (personnel, fringe, travel, equipment, supplies, other, etc.) with appropriate justification. If indirect costs are/will be included in the contract, include the indirect cost rate used. Please note that any statutory limitations on indirect costs also apply to contractors and consultants.
- If contractor employee and consultant hourly rates of pay exceed the salary of a GS-15 step 10 Federal employee in your area (for more information please go to <http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/pay-leave/salaries-wages/>), provide a justification for the expenses. This limit does not include fringe benefits, travel, indirect costs, or other expenses.

<b>Contractual/Consultant Subtotal</b>	
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- **Other** - Include any expenses not covered in any of the previous budget categories. Be sure to break down costs into cost/unit. Expenses in this section include, but are not limited to, meetings and conferences, communications, rental expenses, advertisements, publication costs, and data collection.

If you budget meal costs for reasons other than meals associated with travel per diem, provide an adequate justification to support that these costs are not entertainment costs.

Item Description	Justification of the Expense	Per-Unit Cost	Number of Units	Funds Requested
<b>Other Subtotal</b>				

- **Program Income** - Program income is gross income—earned by a recipient or subrecipient under a grant—directly generated by the grant-supported activity, or earned only because of the grant

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agreement during the grant period of performance. Program income includes, but is not limited to, income from fees for services performed; the sale of commodities or items fabricated under an award (this includes items sold at cost if the cost of producing the item was funded in whole or partially with grant funds); registration fees for conferences, etc.

Source/Nature of Program Income	Description of how you will reinvest the program income into the project to solely enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops	Estimated Income
	<b><i>Program Income Total</i></b>	

## VI. SCORING CRITERIA

**Specialty Crop Industry Goals, Performance Measures and Outcomes** - Proposal demonstrates that it will increase the competitiveness of specialty crop producers, and will impact a significant number of beneficiaries. Project includes a strong outreach/information dissemination component to ensure a broad impact. Outcome measures are thoughtfully developed and realistic – Up to 25 points.

**Relevance to State Priorities** - The proposed project responds to an urgent need and directly relates to one or more of the 2014 Program Goals identified by VAAF – Up to 20 points.

**Experience and Previous Work** - Applicant has evidence of at least 5 years of successful experience in the type of activity proposed in the application for funds. Proposed project builds from previous work on behalf of applicant or partner organizations – Up to 10 points.

**Producer Association Support** - For non-producer organization applicants, please provide a letter of support from a producer organization or industry group. For producer organization applicants, please provide a membership list and your board of directors – Up to 10 points.

**Innovation** - The project is innovative and develops new knowledge that can strengthen the operations of specialty crop producers – Up to 10 points.

**Evaluation** - The project includes a strong monitoring and evaluation plan and explains clearly how outcomes will be measured – Up to 10 points.

**Efficient use of Resources** - Proposal demonstrates partnership. Work plan and budget are realistic. Applicant has leveraged additional matching funds or organizational support to forward the project – Up to 15 points.

**Failure to adhere to reporting requirements and deadlines may disqualify grantee from further grants and/or impact future grant scores.**

## VII. GRANT MANAGEMENT AND REPORTING

### 1. Grant Award Agreement and Payment

Prior to beginning work on the proposed project or receiving funding, successful applicants will be required to sign a Grant Award Agreement with VAAFM indicating their intention to complete the proposed tasks and authorizing VAAFM to monitor the progress of the proposed project. In addition to obtaining a DUNS number (required prior to application submission), successful applicants will be required to register with the federally run Central Contractor Registration database prior to issuance of the Grant Agreement. To register with CCR, go to [www.ccr.gov](http://www.ccr.gov), and click “Start New Registration” to begin.

Grant Award Agreements must be signed and returned to VAAFM within 30 days of receipt. Failure to submit an executed copy of the Grant Award Agreement within 30 days of receipt will result in the loss of awarded grant funds, unless the delay was caused by circumstances outside the control of the grantee. Grantees may submit an invoice for 40% of the total grant amount with their signed Grant Award Agreement. An invoice for an additional 40% of the total grant amount may be submitted with the first annual report. The remaining 20% of grant funds will be retained until receipt of the complete final report.

### 2. Reporting Requirements

VAAFM reserves the right to modify reporting requirements during the course of the project. Information submitted in any report to the Agency will be a public record. If the Grant Recipient considers any information in the report to be a trade secret protected, the Grant Recipient may request that trade secret information be kept confidential and must specifically label the information for which the claim is made. The Agency shall notify the Grant Recipient if a public records request is made for the information claimed as protected by the Grant Recipient. The Grant Recipient may then proceed to obtain judicial protection for the information.

**Annual Reports:** Annual performance reports are required by December 1 of each year at the end of the first year of the date of the signed grant agreement and each year until the expiration date of the grant period. Reports must detail the project status and how grant monies were used to achieve project outcomes outlined in the project proposal submitted with the grant application packet. Reports must also include a detailed financial report that tracks all expenditures against the project budget submitted with the grant proposal.

The annual performance report should be organized under, but not limited to, the following headings for each project:

- **Activities Performed**

Briefly summarize activities performed, targets, and/or performance goals achieved during the reporting period for each project. Include favorable or unusual developments. It is encouraged to clearly convey progress toward achieving outcomes by graphing baseline data and showing the progress toward achieving set targets. If targets have already been achieved, amend the

outcome measure to a —stretch goal, where the organization is challenged to go beyond what it is already doing. Identify the amended measurable outcome in the performance report.

- **Problems and Delays**

Note unexpected delays or impediments for each project. Make sure to 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. Include revised work plan timelines.

- **Future Project Plans**

Summarize activities performed, targets, and/or performance goals to be achieved during the next reporting period for each project. 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 Reports - A final performance report** will be required within 30 days following the end date of the grant agreement. The final report will be posted on the USDA-AMS web site and represents an important vehicle for sharing project findings with Federal and State agencies and the public.

The final report should be organized under, but not limited to, the following headings for each project:

- **Project Summary**

An outline of the issue, problem, interest, or need for each project.

- **Project Approach**

How the issue or problem was approached via the project.

- **Goals and Outcomes Achieved**

How the performance goals and measurable outcomes were achieved for each project(s). If outcome measures were long term, summarize the progress that has been made towards achievement. It is encouraged to clearly convey progress toward achieving outcome measures by graphing baseline data and showing the progress toward achieving set targets.

- **Beneficiaries**

Provide a description and quantitative data for the number of people or operations that have benefited from the project's accomplishments, and/or the potential economic impact of each project.

- **Lessons Learned**

Lessons learned, results, conclusions, for each project. If goals or outcome measures were not achieved, identify and share the lessons learned to help others expedite problem-solving.

- **Contact Person**

Contact person for each project with telephone number and email address.

- **Additional Information**

We encourage submission of any supplemental publications, web sites, photographs, etc.

- **Budget Summary**

In addition to the final project report, VAAFM reserves the right to conduct a follow-up survey of funded projects in order to determine long-term impacts of the project.

**Reporting Compliance** - Applicants who do not submit the semi-annual reports or who submit reports that do not meet all of the above reporting requirements will be required to return all previously disbursed funds to VAAFM.

**Budget Adjustments** - If a material change (10% or greater) in the budget is needed during the project period, a written request may be made to VAAFM to reallocate budget funds between budget categories. However, the total budget amount as dictated by the approved grant award cannot be adjusted.

## **APPENDIX A: STEPS TO DEVELOPING OUTCOME MEASURES**

Whenever possible, the outcomes should include a goal, performance measure, benchmark, and a target. The following four steps provide guidance on how to develop outcome measures.

### **1) Determine What the Project Will Accomplish (i.e. Intended Results of the Project, Generally Expressed as a Goal or Objective)**

Goals or objectives should be: a) based on a needs analysis and be specific, realistic results you hope to achieve through the project activities; b) specific; and c) outcome-oriented. Outcome-oriented objectives identify the ultimate result, while the work plan activities identify how you intend to achieve the objectives. When developing outcome-oriented objectives, ask yourself “why” you are performing each grant activity; and specify not only what will be achieved, but also when those results will be achieved.

### **2) Figure out How to Measure the Results and Select the Performance Measure**

For each objective identified in step 1, select the performance measure. Performance measures are measures/indicators used to observe progress and measure actual results compared to expected results. They are usually expressed in quantifiable terms and should be objective and measurable (numeric values, percentages, scores and indices); although in certain circumstances qualitative measures are appropriate.

### **3) Determine the Benchmark for Each Measure and Set Target Goals for Future Performance**

For each measure identified in Step 2, determine the benchmarks against which you will measure. Benchmarks are usually determined by researching past circumstances in the area you are trying to measure. As an alternative, you may use benchmarks established by third parties accepted as the standard-setters in your industry. If data does not exist, describe the lack of data. It may be appropriate in the first year to set vaguer targets, such as “improvement” where any increase represents outcome achievement, and set more concrete targets in subsequent years when benchmark data is available.

Use the benchmark data to set targets for the quantity of change expected. Targets may be framed in terms of:

- a) Absolute level of achievement (ex: feed 150 homeless people);
- b) Change in level of achievement (ex: feed 150 homeless people, 35 more than last year); or
- c) Change in relation to the scale of the problem (ex: feed 150 homeless people, approximately 10% of the city’s homeless population.)

If you are starting up a new project or trying new approaches remember that little or no measurable progress will be evident in the project start-up phase. This delay in seeing measurable results should be reflected in target-setting. When setting targets, you should take into account external factors that influence your success. You may have a grand ultimate goal, but you should view annual targets as small steps toward that ultimate goal.

You may also want to set stretch goals by using benchmarks as your targets. Benchmarks tell you how the rest of the industry is doing; when you gather data for benchmarks, you look at the results of other organizations serving your type(s) of customers, doing your type of work. In your State plan, you may want to stick to a modest level of planned achievement and reserve your stretch goals for internal use. Another alternative is to include minimum and maximum targets in your application. For example, “We plan, at a minimum, for a 5% increase. However, we will strive for a 10% increase, which our data shows is possible if all external factors work in our favor and our new methodology yields the same results in the demonstration phase.”

#### **4) Develop Your Performance Monitoring Plan or Data Collection Plan**

Define who your data sources are and how the data will be collected. If the project involves a survey, provide some information about the nature of the questions that will be asked, the methodology to be used and the population to be surveyed. If a draft questionnaire is available, you may want to include a copy with the application. Outline how data gathered will be used to correct deficiencies and improve performance, both as it gathered and analyzed and in subsequent project periods. This data collection plan should be integrated into your work plan and budget. Define who your data sources are and how the data will be collected. If the project involves a survey, provide some information about the nature of the questions that will be asked, the methodology to be used and the population to be surveyed. If a draft questionnaire is available, you may want to include a copy with the application. Outline how data gathered will be used to correct deficiencies and improve performance, both as it is gathered and analyzed and in subsequent project periods. This data collection plan should be integrated into your work plan and budget. When expected measurable outcomes are monitored outside the grant period, include the performance monitoring plan in the work plan and indicate how monitoring will occur after the grant period ends without Specialty Crop Block Grant Program funding.

#### ***EXAMPLES OF OUTCOME MEASURES***

##### **EXAMPLE 1**

The GOAL of this project is to promote specialty crop X in Mexico in order to increase the volume.

Volume Increase:

BENCHMARK 2007: Actual volume (20# equiv. cases) of specialty crop exported to Mexico: 53,969

TARGET 2008: 60,000

TARGET 2009: 70,000

TARGET 2010: 80,000

PERFORMANCE MEASURE: Derive from specialty crop commission assessment reports at the end of each year.

##### **EXAMPLE 2**

Increase the number of specialty crop farmers following Good Agricultural Practices (GOAL) from the current 18 (BENCHMARK) to 55 in two years (TARGET) measured by the number of GAP audits passed (PERFORMANCE MEASURE).

**EXAMPLE 3**

Increase fruit and vegetable purchases (GOAL) from the current level of \$2.50 (BENCHMARK) to at least \$3 per enrolled student in awarded schools in one year (TARGET) measured by bi-annual school reports (PERFORMANCE MEASURE).

**EXAMPLE 4**

Work directly with specialty crop industry X to develop a uniform tool to assess the health of their specialty crops to give the industry early warning of potential problems in order to optimize their management practices (GOAL). No such tool currently exists (BENCHMARK). The success of the evaluation will be measured by interviewing 20 stakeholders at the end of three years to determine if they developed the tool (TARGET and PERFORMANCE MEASURE).

**EXAMPLE 5**

Increase visits to the Specialty Crop Website (GOAL) 25% over the course of one year (TARGET) from the current 9,000 annual hits (BENCHMARK) by measuring website visits each month over the next year (PERFORMANCE MEASURE).

**EXAMPLE 6**

Increase consumer awareness of specialty crops by distributing 1000 pieces of informational materials containing locations where to purchase specialty crops (GOAL). Six months after distribution, survey 50 locations (PERFORMANCE MEASURE) to determine if sales increased by 25% (TARGET) from the level before distribution of marketing materials (BENCHMARK).

## APPENDIX B: HELPFUL TIPS

### *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.

### *GAP/GHP Cost Share Programs*

Be sure that plans are in place to reach out to the specialty crop industry in your state to generate sufficient interest in the program to fully implement it.

### *Farmers' Market Promotional, Buy Local Promotion, or Other General Marketing 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.

### *Projects to an Individual or For-Profit Organization*

Be sure that the project proposal clearly demonstrates benefit to the broader specialty crop industry as a whole, rather than to the individual or organization.

### *Double Value Incentive Programs*

Be sure that the proposal clearly demonstrates how funds will be used to **SOLELY** enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. Make sure mechanisms are in place and are adequately described in the project proposal to ensure that purchases of non-specialty crops are not doubled through this program regardless of whether the incentive can only be used for eligible specialty crops. Since the matching benefits may not double fruit and vegetable purchases or consumption, this **DOES NOT** solely enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops.

### *Sponsorship Programs/Expenses*

Keep in mind that the costs associated with sponsorships are considered to be a contribution or donation, which are unallowable. 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.

### *Projects that Measure Success by an Increase in Sales*

Be sure that the applicant has the capacity to collect and the vendors have the willingness to share the necessary data to later report on this outcome.

### *Projects that Build on a Previous SCBGP Grants*

Be sure to clearly demonstrate how the new project differs from and complements, rather than duplicates efforts and funding of the previous project.

### **Additional Resources**

Over the years, SCBGP has provided a number of articles in the [SCBGP Educational Bulletins](#) on issues that are relevant to the development and release of a request for proposals, the application review process, and the development of appropriate **Expected Measurable Outcomes**. We hope this information will be helpful for you as you prepare for the 2014 cycle of funding from SCBGP.

- How to Write A Request for Proposals ([Winter 2011](#))
- Developing Expected Measurable Outcomes ([Winter 2012](#))
- Application Review ([Spring 2012](#) and [Winter 2010](#))