

VERMONT AGENCY OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD & MARKETS

SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT

PROGRAM

FISCAL YEAR 2024 REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets announces the availability of grant funds to enhance the competitiveness of Vermont specialty crops including fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, herbs and spices, medicinal plants, honey, hops, maple syrup, mushrooms, nursery crops (including Christmas trees), and floriculture. Projects funded through this grant program must benefit more than one specialty crop business, individual, or organization.

KEY DATES

PUBLICATION DATE: November 20, 2023

APPLICANT WEBINAR: December 12, 2023

PRE-APPLICATION DEADLINE: January 14, 2024

APPLICATION DEADLINE: March 20, 2024 (invited applicants only)

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PROGRAM QUESTIONS

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Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets staff are available to assist applications during State of Vermont business hours, Monday–Friday, 7:45 AM to 4:30 PM. Please note that immediate assistance may not be available shortly before deadlines.

WEBGRANTS

Applications for this program must be submitted through the [WebGrants](#) grants management system.

REGISTRATION

If you're new to WebGrants, submit the [WebGrants Registration Form](#). It usually takes about two business days to process registrations. Make sure to register for an account well before the application deadline.

SUBMISSION POLICY

Applicants must follow all instructions in this request for applications (RFA), including the dates and times for submitting applications. The Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets will only consider the last complete submission through WebGrants before the deadline as the official application. We cannot accept incomplete or late applications after the deadline, barring exceptional circumstances. The WebGrants system will not accept applications after the deadline.

SUBMISSION CONFIRMATION

After you've submitted your application successfully, you'll be taken to a page confirming your submission. This page will have an Application ID number. You'll also get an email confirming your submission.

SECTION 1: OVERVIEW & ELIGIBILITY

QUICK FACTS

PROGRAM PURPOSE

The purpose of the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) is to enhance the competitiveness of U.S. specialty crops by

- leveraging efforts to market and promote specialty crops;
- assisting producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops;
- expanding availability and access to specialty crops; and
- addressing local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers.

Specialty crops are fruits; vegetables; tree nuts; honey; hops; maple syrup; mushrooms; culinary herbs and spices; medicinal plants; nursery crops (including Christmas trees); and floriculture.¹

Visit [What is a Specialty Crop?](#) for a comprehensive list of eligible and ineligible commodities.

ELIGIBILITY

Any entity may apply, but projects must benefit more than one specialty crop business, individual, or organization. Applicants must describe how their project will benefit and produce measurable outcomes for specialty crop industries rather than a single business, organization, or individual.

AVAILABLE FUNDS

There is no minimum or maximum award; however, we competitively award around \$200,000 total each year. Over the past 5 years, we competitively awarded individual projects between \$4,000 and \$58,000. The average award over this period was around \$35,000, and 50% of awarded projects received between \$20,000 and \$45,000.

PROJECT LENGTH

Projects can be funded for up to 30 months (2 years, 6 months).

FUNDING SOURCE

Vermont SCBGP awards are funded through the United States Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service.

¹ Section 101 of the Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004 (7 U.S.C. 1621 note) and amended under section 10010 of the Agricultural Act of 2014, Public Law 113-79 (the Farm Bill) defines specialty crops as "fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops (including floriculture)."

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) awards [Specialty Crop Block Grants](#) to the 50 States, the District of Columbia, and U.S. Territories. In Vermont, the Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAFAM) administers these funds to enhance the competitiveness of Vermont specialty crops.

The Vermont SCBGP aims to support all of Vermont's specialty crop industries and improve the performance of Vermont specialty crops within local, domestic, and international markets. Applications must describe **projects that are supported by and address the needs of Vermont specialty crop producers**. We encourage projects that will grow Vermont's economy and sustain farmers' livelihoods.

Previously funded Vermont projects are listed on the [Vermont SCBGP](#) webpage.

STATE FUNDING PRIORITIES

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, in partnership with statewide specialty crop stakeholders, identified the following program funding priorities for 2024. **Funding priorities are not ranked.**

FUNDING PRIORITIES

- Research, development, and dissemination of innovative production practices to enhance farm viability and natural resource conservation.
- Pest and disease management
- Enhancing food safety and improving the capacity of specialty crop businesses to comply with Food Safety Modernization Act or food safety audit program requirements
- Value chain enhancement—including strengthening relationships between producers, aggregators, processors, distributors, retail businesses, and consumers
- Technical assistance to address efficiency, conservation, climate change, business viability, workforce development, labor issues, succession planning, and challenges facing beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers
- Market access (local, regional, national, or international), marketing, branding, and consumer education
- Producer collaboration—including establishing or strengthening producer associations and cooperatives
- Climate adaptation and resilience

We strongly encourage innovative projects to develop new knowledge that can strengthen specialty crop businesses.

Projects must also address one or more **priority strategies, strategic goals, objectives, and recommendations for strengthening Vermont's food system**

identified in the [Vermont Agriculture and Food System Strategic Plan 2021–2030](#) (published by the Vermont Farm to Plate Network and the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund).

HOW TO APPLY

Applications for this program must be submitted through the [WebGrants](#) grants management system.

If you're new to WebGrants, submit the [WebGrants Registration Form](#). It usually takes about two business days to process registrations. Make sure to register for an account well before the application deadline.

For assistance with WebGrants, visit the [WebGrants Application Guide](#) at agriculture.vermont.gov/grants/howtoapply. WebGrants technical assistance may not be available shortly before deadlines.

Applicants must submit a pre-application, which includes a project summary and estimated budget, by **January 14, 2024 at 11:59 PM**.

We will invite successful pre-applicants to submit a full application—a more detailed description of a project and complete budget—and provide the full application deadline with this invitation. We provide unsuccessful pre-applicants with feedback upon request.

APPLICANT WEBINAR

- Register for the Vermont SCBGP [Applicant Webinar](#) to be held on December 12, 2023 at 3:00 PM – 4:00 PM: bit.ly/2023SCBGPWebinar
- After registering, you will receive a confirmation email with details for joining the webinar.
- In this webinar, you will gain an introduction to the Vermont SCBGP, the 2024 application process, and our online grants management system, WebGrants.
- The webinar will be recorded and available on the [Vermont SCBGP](#) webpage.

ELIGIBILITY

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Any entity may apply if the proposed project benefits Vermont's specialty crop industries and aligns with program requirements, including funding restrictions. Applicants must describe how the project will benefit and produce measurable outcomes for specialty crop industries and/or the public rather than a single specialty crop business, organization, or individual. We will not fund projects that primarily benefit a single business or that business's product, organization, or individual. Single businesses, organizations, or individuals are encouraged to participate as project partners.

We encourage individual businesses, organizations, or individuals to collaborate with other industry representatives, such as members of producer associations, to ensure

that the project will benefit multiple businesses and address specialty crop industry needs. A non-exhaustive [list of producer associations](#) is available on our website.

DEFINITION OF A PROJECT

A project is a set of interrelated tasks with a cohesive distinct, specified, and defined goal. It follows a planned, organized approach over a fixed period of time and within specific limitations (cost, performance/quality, etc.). Additionally, it uses resources that are specifically allocated to the work of the project and usually involves a team of people.

Projects are different from ongoing operations in an organization because, unlike operations, projects have a definitive beginning and end—they have a limited duration. One way to think about this is that a project has an overarching goal that is accomplished through a series of individual activities or tasks. Examples of projects could include **researching new cultivars** or **marketing apples through a targeted promotional campaign**.

Activities or tasks that could be a part of such projects might include hiring personnel, purchasing special equipment, holding an educational workshop, planting specialty crops, or distributing product promotional materials.

ELIGIBLE PROJECTS

1. Projects must be supported by and address the needs of Vermont specialty crop producers.
2. SCBGP funds must enhance the competitiveness of U.S. or U.S. territory-grown specialty crops in domestic or foreign markets. Visit [What is a Specialty Crop?](#) for a list of eligible commodities.
3. If matching funds will be used to ensure all grant funds enhance the competitiveness of eligible specialty crops, you must keep adequate records to identify and document the specific costs or contributions proposed to meet the match, the source of funding or contribution, and document how the valuation was determined.
4. Applicants must identify at least one **outcome measure** (see Appendix A) that specifically demonstrates the project's impact in enhancing the competitiveness of eligible specialty crops.
5. We will not award funds to an entity to compete unfairly with private companies that provide equivalent products or services.
6. Projects where one organization specifically attempts to disparage the mission, goals, and/or actions of another organization are unallowable.
7. Projects that have not received SCBGP funding in the past are preferred, but applications that build on previously funded SCBGP projects are eligible. In this case, the applicant must describe how the project will differ from and build on previous efforts.

8. Applicants who have demonstrated incomplete or unsatisfactory performance with prior VAAFM grants may be ruled ineligible for participation at the sole discretion of VAAFM.
9. Multi-state projects that address challenges and opportunities that cross state boundaries are eligible.

BENEFIT TO MORE THAN ONE PRODUCT OR ORGANIZATION

Applications for grant funds must describe how the project potentially affects and produces measurable outcomes for Vermont specialty crop industries and/or the public rather than a single organization, institution, or individual. We will not award grant funds for projects that primarily benefit a single business or that business's product, organization, or individual. In addition, grantees cannot use grant funds to compete unfairly with private companies that provide equivalent products or services. The following are examples of eligible and ineligible projects:

EXAMPLES OF ELIGIBLE PROJECTS

- A university requests funding to research the feasibility of planting, cultivating, and growing a specialty crop in a particular area, the results of which will be shared with many growers throughout the state during the project.
- A single grower requests funds to demonstrate the viability of a new specialty crop production method and partners with Extension to publicize the method to other regional growers.
- A single company requests funds to provide a viable pollination alternative to specialty crop stakeholders in a region that currently does not have one.
- A nonprofit organization requests funds to conduct an advertising campaign that will benefit their specialty crop members.

EXAMPLES OF INELIGIBLE PROJECTS

- A company requests grant funds to purchase starter plants or equipment used to plant, cultivate, and grow a specialty crop and expand production of a single business.
- An organization requests grant funds to make grants to individual specialty crop businesses or roadside stands to promote their individual businesses.
- An organization uses grant funds to purchase and sell produce to other entities, competing with private companies who sell produce in the area.
- A sole proprietor requests grant funds to redesign the business logo in order to make a specialty crop value-added product stand out at the local farmers market.
- A single specialty crop organization requests grant funds to market its organization so that it can increase its membership and does not explain how the project will increase the competitiveness of specialty crops.

MATCHING FUNDS

All proposals must show matching funds representing **at least 50%** of the SCBGP grant request. For instance, for a grant request of \$10,000, the applicant must demonstrate at least \$5,000 in match. Matching funds may be contributed by the applicant or by another organization. The 50% required match may be any combination of cash and in-kind funds.

- **Examples of cash match** include funds in the bank, funds contributed by another organization, applicant labor, and compensation of employees. Labor rates should be in line with current market rates.
- **Examples of in-kind match** include goods or services provided during the grant period for which no expenditure is made (e.g., contractors, consultants, supplies or equipment provided pro bono for the project, volunteer labor, and/or donated supplies that are not part of the normal cost of doing business). In-kind contributions must be made during the grant agreement period and be directly related to the project.

Indirect costs (also known as “facilities and administrative costs”) are costs incurred for common or joint objectives that cannot be identified specifically with a particular project, program, or organizational activity. The salaries of administrative and clerical staff should normally be treated as indirect costs. **The Vermont SCBGP cannot fund indirect costs**, but unrecovered indirect costs may be counted as match.

An applicant may propose cost-sharing or matching contributions as a mechanism to ensure all SCBGP grant funds will enhance the competitiveness of eligible specialty crops. If your project may benefit non-specialty crop industries (e.g., grain, livestock, or dairy), you may be required to 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.

For example, a project promotes Vermont-grown specialty crops through marketing agritourism opportunities. Non-specialty crop farms account for 40% of the farms participating in the agritourism program; therefore, a 50% match will be adequate to account for any benefit the non-specialty crops farms could gain from the project.

OUTCOME MEASURES

AMS is required to report on the outcomes of the SCBGP on a national scale to demonstrate the performance of this program. In an effort to fulfill this requirement, AMS collaborated with stakeholders, including the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB), to develop a listing of measurable outcomes and indicators that quantifiably measure performance toward fulfilling the program’s purpose of enhancing 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, U.S. Congress, the agricultural community, and the general public.

Each project **must** include at least one of the eight outcomes listed in **Appendix A: USDA Evaluation Plan** and at least one of the indicators listed under the selected outcome(s). Progress toward outcomes and indicators selected will be reported in annual and final performance reports.

APPLICATION REVIEW & AWARD INFORMATION

Vermont SCBGP funds will be awarded to projects that benefit specialty crop industries through a competitive review process. A committee of at least five industry stakeholders, including at least two farmers, will review all applications and make recommendations to VAAFM. VAAFM will make final recommendations to USDA-AMS on all awards.

Multi-year projects are encouraged, and grants may be awarded for projects up to 2 years, 6 months in length. Although awards are not capped, note that over the past 5 years, the average award was around \$35,000, and 50% of awarded projects received between \$20,000 and \$45,000.

DEADLINES

All applicants must submit a **pre-application** by **January 14, 2024 at 11:59 PM**.

Review **Section IV: Scoring Criteria**, carefully to ensure that your application addresses areas that will be evaluated by the review committee and **Appendix B: Allowable Costs & Activities** to ensure all budgeted costs are allowable. After reviewing pre-applications, the review committee will invite applicants with the top-ranking proposals to submit full applications. We will provide the deadline to submit full applications with this invitation.

KEY DATES (SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

NOVEMBER 21, 2023	Request for Applications (RFA) released
DECEMBER 4, 2023	Pre-applications open for submission in WebGrants
DECEMBER 12, 2024	SCBGP Information Session Webinar
3:00 PM – 4:00 PM	Register at bit.ly/2024SCBGPWebinar
JANUARY 14, 2024 11:59 PM	Deadline to submit a Pre-Application
FEBRUARY 2, 2024	Pre-applicants notified of invitation to submit a full application
MARCH 20, 2024	Deadline to submit a full application (invited applicants only)
APRIL 2024	Applicants notified of funding decisions
MAY 1, 2024	Vermont Agency of Agriculture submits State Plan to USDA
AUGUST 2024	Grantees notified of USDA decisions. Adjustments may be required.
OCTOBER 2024	USDA announces final awards

RELATED FUNDED OPPORTUNITIES

SPECIALTY CROP MULTI-STATE PROGRAM

The [Specialty Crop Multi-State Program](#) (SCMP) offers grants to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops by funding collaborative, multi-state projects that address the following regional or national level specialty crop issues: food safety; plant pests and disease; research; crop-specific projects addressing common issues; and marketing and promotion.

WORKING LANDS ENTERPRISE FUND

[Working Lands](#) grants fund agriculture and forestry projects that enhance Vermont's communities, economy, and culture.

FARM TO INSTITUTION MARKET DEVELOPMENT GRANTS

The [Farm to Institution Market Development Grant](#) (formerly Local Food Market Development Grant) supports market development opportunities for local food producers and processors, with a focus on Vermont institutional markets INCLUDING schools, hospitals, colleges, and correctional facilities.

ADDITIONAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES & RESOURCES FOR BUSINESSES

VAAFAM offers [funding opportunities](#) as well as a menu of [business planning and assistance](#) resources for the Vermont agricultural community:

PROJECTS MORE RELEVANT FOR OTHER FEDERAL GRANT PROGRAMS

Entities that engage in projects that support the increased consumption of fruits and vegetables in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) should consider submitting those projects to the [Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program](#).

Entities that engage in projects that support domestic farmers' markets, roadside stands, community-supported agriculture programs, agritourism activities, other direct producer-to-consumer market opportunities, and 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](#) or [Local Food Promotion Program](#).

Entities that engage in projects that support biobased products and bioenergy and energy programs, including biofuels and other alternative uses for agricultural and forestry commodities (development of biobased products), should visit the [USDA Energy Matrix](#) website for information on how to submit those projects for consideration to the energy programs supported by USDA.

SECTION 2: PRE-APPLICATION

A pre-application provides a summary of your project idea and estimated budget. After reviewing pre-applications, the review committee will invite applicants with the top-ranking proposals to submit full applications. To submit a pre-application, follow these instructions.

1. Review this Request for Applications (RFA) in its entirety, including **Section 4: Scoring Criteria** and **Appendix B: Allowable Costs & Activities**. We encourage applicants to also review the **recommendations and priority strategies for strengthening Vermont's food system** identified in the [Vermont Agriculture and Food System Strategic Plan 2021–2030](#).
2. If you're new to [WebGrants](#), submit the [WebGrants Registration Form](#). It usually takes about two business days to process registrations. Make sure to register for an account well before the application deadline.
3. Start an application in [WebGrants](#). For guidance, review the [WebGrants Application Guide](#).
4. Draft responses to the questions below and enter your responses in the [WebGrants](#) application forms.
5. Submit your pre-application in [WebGrants](#) by **January 14, 2024 at 11:59 PM**.
6. Add agriculturegrants.vermont@mail.webgrantscloud.com to your email contacts or "safe senders" list to ensure you receive messages and alerts from the system.

APPLICANT & PROGRAM INFORMATION

Applications must be submitted through the Agency's grant management system, [WebGrants](#). The information below is requested in the online application. You may find it helpful to draft your answers in a Word document first, and then copy and paste into the WebGrants forms.

We encourage you to start the online application well in advance of the deadline.

APPLICANT INFORMATION

The following four sections are included in all Agricultural Development Division grant applications. Questions marked with * are required.

Applicant Information

- Which of the following categories best describes the person/people completing this application? Please select all that apply*
- Name*
- Email address*
- Phone number*

- Preferred method of communication*
- Job title*
- How did you hear about this funding opportunity?*

Applicant's Business/Organization Information

Some questions in this section may not apply to your business or organization and are optional.

- Legal name of the organization*
- Business or organization type*
- Street address*
- Town/City*
- County*
- Number of full-time employees, including owner(s)*
- Number of part-time and seasonal employees
- Total number of volunteer hours that benefit your organizations in a typical year
- Years in operation*
- Provide the organization's website if one exists
- Share any social media handles the organization uses
- Is the organization a farm, forestry or other land-based operation?*
 - If yes, how many acres are currently in production?
 - How many acres, if any, are currently in conservation?
 - How many acres of leased or rented land does the organization use for production and/or processing?
- Have you applied for or received a grant through the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets in the past 5 years?*

Optional Business/Organization Information

- What is the applicant business/organization's most recent annual operating budget?
- What is the median hourly wage for all employees?
- Does the organization provide any of the following benefits to its employees and/or volunteers?
- Does the organization hire H-2A farmworkers?

Voluntary Demographic Information

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets is collecting voluntary demographic information to better serve our constituents and inform the development of future grant programs. Please click the link to be taken to complete this anonymous survey: forms.office.com/g/dp8zqWrgxL.

The demographic survey is hosted through a separate online platform to ensure that any information collected through the survey cannot be linked in any way to your WebGrants application. Funding decisions are based solely on the information provided

in your WebGrants application. Any information collected through the demographic survey is anonymous and will only be used to help improve the programming and services offered by the Development Division of the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets.

PRIMARY APPLICANT

Be prepared to enter the following:

- Applicant Name
- Business or Organization
- Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) *
- Mailing Address
- Phone Number
- Email Address
- Applicant Type (Nonprofit; Producer; Producer association or cooperative; State agency or department; University extension; University researcher)

You will be asked to self-certify that you are in compliance with State regulations and in good standing with the State of Vermont.

*All entities doing business with the federal government use the Unique Entity ID (UEI) created in [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov). If your business or organization does not yet have a UEI, enter 000000000000 in this field. You must create an account in [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov) and receive a UEI to submit a full application.

ADDITIONAL CONTACTS

Are there additional contacts who should be notified about or will collaborate on this application? To add additional contacts who will collaborate on your application or who should be notified about your application's status, return to the **General Information** form, click **Edit**, then select **Additional Grantee Contacts**. Use the Ctrl key to select more than one contact.

Additional contacts must register in WebGrants before they can be added to your application.

PROGRAM INFORMATION

Answers to the following questions are for program reporting only and will not affect scoring.

- **Will your project benefit Socially Disadvantaged Farmers?**
A 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.

- **Will your project benefit Beginning Farmers?**

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

If the project directly benefits socially disadvantaged or beginning farmers in any way, select “yes.” Be aware that USDA receives requests for projects that benefit socially disadvantaged or beginning farmers and provide project abstracts to the public to explain how each project benefits these groups.

- **How did you learn about this funding opportunity?**

PROJECT TITLE & DURATION

Character counts indicated below include spaces.

Project Title

Provide a descriptive project title in 15 words or fewer. *Maximum 200 characters.*

Provide the estimated start and end dates for your project.

The default start date is 10/01/2024. Enter an end date no later than 03/31/2027.

If you are considering an earlier start date, contact Madison Berry at AGR.SpecialtyCrops@vermont.gov or 802-622-4626 to discuss pre-award cost provisions.

Provide the estimated length of your project in months. Maximum length is 30 months.

PROJECT TYPE

Use the drop-down menus to select answers to these questions. *Hold the Ctrl key to select multiple items.*

Which specialty crop industry or industries will your project benefit? (Choose all that apply.)

- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Tree Nuts
- Dried Fruits
- Culinary Herbs and Spices or Medicinal Plants
- Honey
- Hops
- Maple Syrup
- Nursery Crops (including Christmas Trees) or Floriculture

- Other

If you chose "Other" above, please specify.

How will this project enhance the competitiveness of U.S. specialty crops?

- Leverage efforts to market and promote specialty crops
- Assist producers with research and development relevant to specialty crops
- Expand availability and access to specialty crops
- Address local, regional, and national challenges confronting specialty crop producers
- Other purpose, determined in consultation with specialty crop stakeholders

Which state funding priority will your project address?

- Research, development, and dissemination of innovative production practices to enhance farm viability and natural resource conservation.
- Pest and disease management
- Enhancing food safety and improving the capacity of specialty crop businesses to comply with Food Safety Modernization Act or food safety audit program requirements
- Value chain enhancement—including strengthening relationships between producers, aggregators, processors, distributors, retail businesses, and consumers
- Technical assistance to address efficiency, conservation, climate change, business viability, workforce development, labor issues, succession planning, and challenges facing beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers
- Market access (local, regional, national, or international), marketing, branding, and consumer education
- Producer collaboration—including establishing or strengthening producer associations and cooperatives.
- Climate adaptation and resilience.

Identify one or more priority strategy, strategic goal, objective, or recommendation from the [Vermont Agriculture and Food System Strategic Plan 2021–2030](#) that this project will address. *Maximum 1000 characters.*

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

PROJECT SUMMARY

Provide a very brief—one sentence, if possible—description of your project, including, (1) the applicant organization, (2) a concise outline of the project's outcomes, and (3) a general description of the tasks to be completed to meet this goal. *Maximum 1,000 characters.*

Suggested Outline:

[Name of Organization] will [What will your project achieve?] by [How will you achieve it?]

The Project Summary is a summation of intended project activities and outcomes, similar to an abstract. If funded, this statement will be used to promote the project. When requests are made of the program for particular projects, this is what USDA will release to the public.

Example: *ABC University will mitigate the spread of citrus greening (Huanglongbing) by developing scientifically-based practical measures to implement in a quarantine area and disseminating results to stakeholders through grower meetings and field days.*

The Project Purpose (below) provides more detail about the project's background, the reason it's being proposed, and the project's beneficiaries. The Project Purpose is essentially the "nuts and bolts" of the proposal, while the Project Summary is a condensed statement of the project's activities and outcomes.

PROJECT PURPOSE

SPECIFIC ISSUE

Describe the context for your project and the specific issue, problem, or need your project will address. How did you identify this issue, problem, or need? *Maximum 3,000 characters.*

OBJECTIVES

Provide the objectives that this project hopes to achieve. How will your project address the issue, problem, or need you identified above? A project's objectives are different from the outcomes identified above. Objectives should flow from the purpose or goal of the project and be stated as actions that are realistic and tangible, but not necessarily quantifiable, during the project. For example, an objective could be "to adapt lettuce cultivars to environments in which less water and nitrogen will be available and applied." *Maximum 2,000 characters.*

IMPACT

Describe your project's impact on Vermont specialty crop industries. Who will benefit from your project? Describe your outreach plan for reaching this audience or audiences. *Maximum 2,000 characters.*

Identify one or more priority strategy, strategic goal, objective, or recommendation from the Vermont Agriculture and Food System Strategic Plan 2021–2030 that this project will address. *Maximum 500 characters.*

EXTERNAL PROJECT SUPPORT & PARTNERS

Describe the specialty crop stakeholders who support and will benefit from this project (other than the applicant and organizations involved in the project).

Indicate whether you have spoken with prospective stakeholders and supporters and confirmed that they would be interested in supporting the effort. *Maximum 500 characters.*

Why do the stakeholders support this project? *Maximum 1,500 characters.*

List all partner organizations that are formally participating with you in this project. Indicate whether you have spoken with prospective project partners and confirmed that they would be interested in collaborating on this effort. If you are the only formally participating organization, specify this. *Maximum 500 characters.*

EXPECTED MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

OUTCOME MEASURES

How will your project enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops? (Choose all that apply and that you can measure during the course of your project.)

- **Outcome 1:** Increasing Consumption and Consumer Purchasing of Specialty Crops
- **Outcome 2:** Increasing Access to Specialty Crops and Expanding Specialty Crop Production and Distribution
- **Outcome 3:** Increase Food Safety Knowledge and Processes
- **Outcome 4:** Improve Pest and Disease Control Processes
- **Outcome 5:** Develop New Seed Varieties and Specialty Crops
- **Outcome 6:** Expand Specialty Crop Research and Development
- **Outcome 7:** Improve Environmental Sustainability of Specialty Crops

If none of the specified outcome measures will accurately describe your project outcome(s), propose appropriate alternative outcome(s). Proposed alternatives are subject to approval by AMS. *Maximum 1,500 characters.*

EVALUATION

Describe your monitoring and evaluation plan. How will you collect data to measure progress toward the outcome(s) you have identified? Include the types of data you will collect. You may specify one or more indicator provided in **Appendix B: USDA Evaluation Plan**. Indicators will be required in the full application. *Maximum 2,000 characters.*

CONTINUATION PROJECTS

If your project is continuing the efforts of a previously funded SCBGP project, describe how this project will differ from and build on the previous efforts. *Maximum 1,500 characters.*

SUPPORT FROM OTHER FEDERAL OR STATE GRANT PROGRAMS

Have you submitted this project to a Federal or State grant program other than the SCBGP for funding and/or is a Federal or State grant program other than the SCBGP funding the project currently? *The SCBGP will not fund duplicative projects.*

If your project is receiving or will potentially receive funds from another Federal or State grant program, identify the Federal or State grant program and describe how the SCBGP project differs from or supplements the efforts of the other grant programs. Maximum 1,500 characters.

BUDGET SUMMARY

All proposals must show matching funds representing at least 50% of the grant request. For instance, for a grant request of \$10,000, the applicant must demonstrate a minimum of \$5,000 in match. This 50% match may be a combination of cash and in-kind contributions. Review Program Overview and Matching Funds for additional guidance. 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.

Matching funds may be used to ensure that all SCBGP funds will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. If your project may benefit non-specialty crop industries (e.g., grain, livestock, or dairy), you may be required document how you have determined that the specific costs or contributions proposed to meet the match will cover the appropriate percentage of non-specialty crop industries.

PROJECT BUDGET

The line items of this budget may be estimated; however, the total requested amount should not increase after the pre-application stage of the application process. Consult **Appendix B: Allowable Costs & Activities** if you have questions about whether costs can be funded by the Vermont SCBGP.

Equipment is defined as tangible personal property (including information technology systems) having a useful life of more than one year and a per-unit acquisition cost that equals or exceeds the lesser of the capitalization level established by the non-federal entity for financial statement purposes, or \$5,000.

Be prepared to enter the following in this section:

- Specialty Crop Block Grant Program request
- Matching funds
- Match source
- Total project budget (including matching funds)

BUDGET SUMMARY				
CATEGORY	SCBGP REQUEST	MATCHING FUNDS	MATCH SOURCE	TOTAL

Personnel				
Fringe Benefits				
Travel				
Equipment				
Supplies				
Contractual				
Other				
TOTAL BUDGET				

BUDGET DETAILS

- Specify Equipment items. *Maximum 500 characters.*
- Specify Supplies. *Maximum 500 characters.*
- Specify Contractual items. *Maximum 500 characters.*
- Specify Other items. *Maximum 500 characters.*
- Are all matching funds/contributions committed at this time? If all matching funds/contributions are not yet committed, describe.
- Matching funds waiver request (limited circumstances only)
- Will your project benefit non-specialty crop industries (e.g., grain, livestock, or dairy)? If yes, explain how you have determined that matching funds will cover the appropriate percentage of non-specialty crop industries.

SECTION 3: APPLICATION

FULL APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

Only applicants that have submitted a pre-application and been invited to apply may submit a full application. Applicants will be notified in February 2024 of their invitation to apply. The full application deadline will be provided with this invitation. To complete your full application:

1. Review this Request for Applications (RFA) in its entirety, including **Section 4: Scoring Criteria** and **Appendix B: Allowable Costs & Activities**. We encourage applicants to also review the **recommendations and priority strategies for strengthening Vermont's food system** identified in the [Vermont Agriculture and Food System Strategic Plan 2021–2030](#).
2. Log in to [WebGrants](#) at and select **Funding Opportunities > Specialty Crop Block Grant Program 2024 > Apply Final**. Do not start a new application.
3. Prepare and upload your project profile to the application.
4. Prepare and add your project budget to the application.
5. Non-producer organization applicants must attach a letter of support from a producer organization or industry group. Multiple letters of support may be included. Producer organization applicants must include a membership list and the board of directors.
6. Submit your completed application in [WebGrants](#) by the deadline provided.
7. Add agriculturegrants.vermont@mail.webgrantscloud.com to your email contacts or “safe senders” list to ensure you receive messages and alerts from the system.

PROJECT PROFILE

The USDA has provided a PDF version of the Project Profile that all full applicants will be required to fill out. You will need a free copy of [Adobe Acrobat](#) in order to complete this form.

The full Project Profile will be sent to all invited full applicants, and can also be downloaded [here](#):

SECTION 4: APPLICATION SCORING CRITERIA

Applications will be evaluated according to the following scoring criteria.

PROJECT PURPOSE

The proposed project responds to an important need and relates directly to one of the state funding priorities identified for 2024. Applicant clearly describes an important issue, problem, or need that the project will address. Applicant provides evidence of this issue, problem, or need and its relevance to specialty crop producers.

Up to 20 points

IMPACT

Proposal demonstrates that it will enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops and impact a significant number of beneficiaries. Applicant provides realistic approach to the issue, problem, or need identified.

Up to 15 points

EXTERNAL PROJECT SUPPORT & PARTNERS

Applicant describes the specialty crop stakeholders—other than the applicant, individuals, and organizations directly involved in the project—who support the project and explains why. Applicant lists the partner organizations formally participating with the lead applicant or specifies that applicant is the only participating organization. Applicant has spoken with prospective supporters and partners and confirmed that they would be interested in supporting the effort.

Up to 15 points

OUTREACH

Applicant credibly describes how the organization will reach proposed beneficiaries. Proposal demonstrates partnership and highlights a realistic outreach plan.

Up to 10 points

OUTCOME DATA

The outcome measures(s) selected is/are appropriate for the work proposed. Applicant clearly explains how progress toward outcomes will be monitored and measured, including the types of data that will be collected.

Up to 10 points

EFFICIENT USE OF RESOURCES

Budget summary is realistic and sufficient to accomplish the work proposed. Applicant has leveraged the required percentage of matching funds and sufficient organizational support to forward the project.

Up to 10 points

EXPERIENCE & PREVIOUS WORK

Applicant demonstrates the capacity to do the work outlined in the project. Proposed project builds from previous work on behalf of applicant or partner organizations.

Up to 10 points

VERMONT AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEM STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT

The applicant identifies one or more priority strategy, strategic goal, objective, or recommendation from the *Vermont Agriculture and Food System Strategic Plan 2021—2030* that the proposed project will address. The application demonstrates that the proposed project aligns with an existing priority strategy, strategic goal, objective, or recommendation from the plan.

Up to 10 points

SECTION 5: GRANT MANAGEMENT & REPORTING

GRANT AGREEMENT & PAYMENT

Prior to receiving funding, successful applicants must sign a grant agreement with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAFMM) indicating their intent to complete the proposed project and authorizing VAAFMM to monitor the project's progress. The grant agreement will include provisions (terms and conditions) set by the State of Vermont as well as program-specific requirements. Review [Attachment C - Standard State Provisions and Contracts and Grants](#) (12/15/2017 Revised) at bgs.vermont.gov/purchasing-contracting/forms for the current State provisions.

Prior to commencement of work and release of any payments, grantee must submit:

1. **A certificate of insurance** consistent with the requirements set forth in Attachment C of the grant agreement
2. **A current IRS Form W-9** (Request for Taxpayer Identification Number and Certification)
3. **Documentation** verifying pledged matching funds, as applicable

GRANTEE PAYMENT SCHEDULE

- Upon receipt of certificate of insurance and Form W-9, confirmation of SAM registration, and claim submission in WebGrants, grantees receive an **initial payment** equal to not more than 40% of the total grant. Failure to submit all required documents and an executed copy of the grant agreement within 30 days of receipt may result in the loss of awarded funds.
- A **second payment** equal to not more than 40% of the total grant will be issued upon approval of grantee's annual or interim performance report by the grant manager and receipt of a claim in WebGrants.
- A **final payment** equal to not more than 20% of the total grant will be issued upon approval of grantee's final performance report by the grant manager and receipt of a claim in WebGrants. The final performance report is due no later than 30 days after the grant end date.

Final invoices must be submitted to the State within 45 days of the grant expiration date. Invoices submitted before the completion of an annual, interim, or final report will not be paid until the report has been received, reviewed, and accepted by the grant manager. Payment may be issued prior to official USDA approval of the annual, interim, or final performance report at the grant manager's discretion.

The State cannot reimburse the grantee for work performed after the expiration date of the grant.

Certificate of Insurance

A certificate of insurance (COI) is a common requirement for businesses and organizations; most agents are familiar with it. The State of Vermont must be listed as an additional insured on the grantee's policy. We recommend forwarding the insurance requirements below to prospective insurers for accuracy:

Insurance: Before commencing work on this Agreement the Party must provide certificates of insurance to show that the following minimum coverages are in effect. It is the responsibility of the Party to maintain current certificates of insurance on file with the State through the term of this Agreement. No warranty is made that the coverages and limits listed herein are adequate to cover and protect the interests of the Party for the Party's operations. These are solely minimums that have been established to protect the interests of the State.

Workers Compensation: With respect to all operations performed, the Party shall carry workers' compensation insurance in accordance with the laws of the State of Vermont. Vermont will accept an out-of-state employer's workers' compensation coverage while operating in Vermont provided that the insurance carrier is licensed to write insurance in Vermont and an amendatory endorsement is added to the policy adding Vermont for coverage purposes. Otherwise, the party shall secure a Vermont workers' compensation policy, if necessary, to comply with Vermont law.

General Liability and Property Damage: With respect to all operations performed under this Agreement, the Party shall carry general liability insurance having all major divisions of coverage including, but not limited to:

Premises - Operations

Products and Completed Operations

Personal Injury Liability

Contractual Liability

The policy shall be on an occurrence form and limits shall not be less than:

\$1,000,000 Each Occurrence

\$2,000,000 General Aggregate

\$1,000,000 Products/Completed Operations Aggregate

\$1,000,000 Personal & Advertising Injury

Automotive Liability: The Party shall carry automotive liability insurance covering all motor vehicles, including hired and non-owned coverage, used in connection with the Agreement. Limits of coverage shall not be less than \$500,000 combined single limit. If performance of this Agreement involves construction, or the transport of

persons or hazardous materials, limits of coverage shall not be less than \$1,000,000 combined single limit.

Additional Insured: *The General Liability and Property Damage coverages required for performance of this Agreement shall include the State of Vermont and its agencies, departments, officers and employees as Additional Insureds. If performance of this Agreement involves construction, or the transport of persons or hazardous materials, then the required Automotive Liability coverage shall include the State of Vermont and its agencies, departments, officers and employees as Additional Insureds. Coverage shall be primary and non-contributory with any other insurance and self-insurance.*

Notice of Cancellation or Change: *There shall be no cancellation, change, potential exhaustion of aggregate limits or non-renewal of insurance coverage(s) without thirty (30) days written prior written notice to the State.*

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 grantee considers any information in the report to be a trade secret protected, the grantee 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 grantee if a public records request is made for the information claimed as protected by the grantee. The grantee may then proceed to obtain judicial protection for the information.

The Vermont SCBGP Manager will provide grantees with templates for Annual Reports, Interim Reports, and Final Performance Reports. View sample report templates on the [Vermont SCBGP webpage](#). Failure to adhere to reporting requirements and deadlines may disqualify the grantee from future grant opportunities.

1. Grantees submit up to two Annual Performance Reports for grants whose start and end dates encompass more than 14 months. Reports will be due no later than December 1. Annual Performance Reports are not required for the immediate December 1 following a fourth (calendar) quarter initiated grant but are required in the second and third December of the grant period. Annual Performance Reports require information on Federal fund expenditures; program income, if applicable; accomplishments; challenges and developments; and activities conducted to ensure that grant funds were used to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops, if applicable.
2. Grantees submit an Interim Performance Report for grants where start and end dates encompass less than 15 months on a date mutually agreed upon by the SCBGP Manager and Grantee. Interim Performance Reports require the same information as the Annual Performance Report above.

3. Grantees submit a Final Performance Report no later than thirty (30) days from the grant end date. Final Performance Reports require information on Federal project expenditures, project impact and findings; number of beneficiaries; activities performed; lessons learned; continuation and dissemination of results, if applicable; and outcome measures, indicators, and data collection.

SCBGP PROGRAM PROVISIONS

All grants awarded under the VT SCBGP are subject to program-specific provisions (terms and conditions), which will be incorporated into each grant agreement. Please see the [Vermont SCBGP webpage](#) for current provisions. These provisions may be revised before we issue 2024 awards.

APPENDIX A: OUTCOMES & INDICATORS

Adapted from USDA Agricultural Marketing Service's [Specialty Crop Block Grant Program – Outcomes and Indicators](#), published July 2021.

SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The Specialty Crops Competitiveness Act of 2004 (7 U.S.C. 1621 note) authorized the U.S. Department of Agriculture to make grants to be used by State departments of agriculture to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops under the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP). Specialty crops are an increasingly important commodity area within the United States agricultural arena, as there is an increasing demand by the public for year-round, healthy, nutritious and sustainable food.

The 2014 Farm Bill, Section 10010, extended the SCBGP. Each State department of agriculture is eligible to receive an estimated base grant and an additional amount based on the average of the most recent available value and acreage of specialty crop production for that State. AMS encourages State departments of agriculture to conduct outreach to specialty crop stakeholders, including socially disadvantaged and beginning farmers, to disseminate information about the program and identify funding priorities. AMS also encourages State departments of agriculture to develop their State Plans through a competitive review process to ensure maximum public input and benefit.

SPECIALTY CROP BLOCK GRANT PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) is required to report on the outcomes of the SCBGP at a national scale to demonstrate the performance of this program. By collecting, aggregating, and reporting performance data across all states and territories, AMS can share the impact of the SCBGP with all stakeholders, including the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), Congress, the agricultural community, and the general public. AMS will aggregate the data collected to assess the overall impact of the program and report to OMB and Congress on these national outcome measures. AMS will review the information received in performance reports and modify the outcomes and indicators as needed over time to lead to better results in showing the impact of the SCBGP.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR APPLICANTS

- Each funded project must include at least one of eight specified outcomes listed below, and at least one of the indicators listed underneath the selected outcome(s). 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.

- Progress toward each indicator selected must be reported in the Annual Performance Report and the result in the Final Performance Report.
- Difference between "jobs" and "careers": jobs are net gain of paid employment; new businesses created or adopted can indicate new careers.
- A 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.
- A 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.

OUTCOME MEASURES

Outcome 1: Increasing Consumption and Consumer Purchasing of Specialty Crops

Indicator 1.1. Total number of consumers who gained knowledge about specialty crops_____.

1.1.a. Adults_____.

1.1.b. Children_____.

Indicator 1.2. Total number of consumers who consumed more specialty crops_____.

1.2.a. Adults_____.

1.2.b. Children_____.

Indicator 1.3. Number of additional specialty crop customers counted_____.

Indicator 1.4. Number of additional business transactions executed_____.

Indicator 1.5. Increased sales measured in:

1.5.a. Dollars_____.

1.5.b. Percent change_____.

1.5.c. 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 and Distribution

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

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

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

- 2.3.a. Number of new online portals created to sell specialty crops_____.
 - 2.3.b. Number with expanded seasonal availability_____.
 - 2.3.c. Number of existing market access points that expanded specialty crop offerings_____.
 - 2.3.d. Number of new market access points that established specialty crop offerings_____.
- Indicator 2.4.** Number of stakeholders that gained knowledge about more efficient and effective distribution systems_____.
- Indicator 2.5.** Number of stakeholders that adopted best practices or new technologies to improve distribution systems_____.
- Indicator 2.6.** Total number of partnerships established between producers, distributors, and/or other relevant intermediaries related to distribution systems_____. Of those established:
- 2.6.a. Number formalized with written agreements (i.e. MOU's, signed contracts, etc.)_____.
 - 2.6.b. Number of partnerships with underserved organizations_____.
- Indicator 2.7.** Total number of new/improved distribution systems developed_____.
- Of those, the number that:
- 2.7.a. Stemmed from new partnerships_____.
 - 2.7.b. Increased efficiency_____.
 - 2.7.c. Reduced costs_____.
 - 2.7.d. Increased specialty crop grower participation_____.
 - 2.7.e. Expanded customer reach_____.
 - 2.7.f. Increased online presence_____.
- Indicator 2.8.** Number of specialty crop-related jobs:
- 2.8.a. Created_____.
 - 2.8.b. Maintained_____.
- Indicator 2.9.** Total number of new individuals who went into specialty crop production as a result of marketing_____. Of those, the number who are:
- 2.9.a. Beginning farmers or ranchers_____.
 - 2.9.b. Socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers_____.
- Indicator 2.10.** Number of market access points that reported increased:
- Revenue_____.
 - Sales_____.
 - Cost-savings_____.

Outcome 3: Increase Food Safety Knowledge and Processes

- Indicator 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)_____.
- Indicator 3.2.** Number of stakeholders that:
- 3.2.a. Established a food safety plan_____.

3.2.b. Revised or updated their food safety plan_____.

Indicator 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)_____.

Indicator 3.4. Number of prevention, detection, control, or intervention practices developed or enhanced to mitigate food safety risks_____.

Indicator 3.5. Number of stakeholders that used grant funds to:

3.5.a. Purchase_____.

3.5.b. Upgrade food safety equipment_____.

Outcome 4: Improve Pest and Disease Control Processes

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

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

Indicator 4.3. Number of stakeholders trained in early detection and rapid response practices to combat pests and diseases_____. Of those:

4.3.a. Number of additional acres managed using integrated pest management_____.

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

Indicator 4.5. Total number of producers/processors that enhanced or maintained pest and disease control practices_____. Of those, the number that reported:

4.5.a. Reduction in product lost to pest and diseases_____.

4.5.b. Improved crop quality_____.

4.5.c. Reduction in labor costs_____.

4.5.d. Reduction in pesticide use_____.

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

4.6.a. Improving speed_____.

4.6.b. Improving reliability_____.

4.6.c. Expanding capability_____.

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

Outcome 5: Develop New Seed Varieties and Specialty Crops

Indicator 5.1. Number of cultivar and/or variety trials conducted_____. Of those:

5.1.a. The number that advanced to further stages of development_____.

Indicator 5.2. Number of cultivars and/or seed varieties developed_____.

Indicator 5.3. Number of cultivars and/or seed varieties released_____.

Indicator 5.4. Number of growers adopting new cultivars and/or varieties_____.

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

Outcome 6: Expand Specialty Crop Research and Development

Indicator 6.1. Number of research goals accomplished_____.

Indicator 6.2. For research conclusions, the number that:

6.2.a. Yielded findings that supported continued research_____.

6.2.b. Yielded findings that led to completion of study_____.

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

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

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

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

6.4.b. Number of citations counted_____.

Outcome 7: Improve Environmental Sustainability of Specialty Crops

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

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

Indicator 7.3. Number of producers that adopted environmental best practices or tools_____.

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

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

7.5.a. Water quality/ conservation_____.

7.5.b. Soil health_____.

7.5.c. Biodiversity_____.

7.5.d. Reduction in energy use_____.

7.5.e. Other positive environmental outcomes (optional)_____.

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

APPENDIX B: ALLOWABLE COSTS & ACTIVITIES

This appendix, adapted from the [USDA AMS General Terms and Conditions](#) is a general guide to allowable costs and activities under the Federal grant program and is not all-inclusive; the Vermont SCBGP may restrict certain costs in addition to USDA guidelines. Consult the Federal Cost Principles ([Subpart E-Cost Principles of 2 CFR Part 200](#)) for complete explanations of the allowability of costs. Contact the Vermont SCBGP Coordinator with questions.

All SCBGP costs must enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops. At minimum, the costs of activities that benefit specialty crops must be readily distinguishable from other financial activities. If you cannot do this or it is impractical to segregate these costs, then the costs are not allowable.

If a cost or activity requiring prior approval is not included or fully described in the approved application, you must obtain post-award prior approval.

DIRECT & INDIRECT COSTS

Applicants are responsible for presenting direct and indirect costs appropriately and consistently and must not include costs associated with their organization's indirect cost rate agreement as direct costs. In addition, a cost may not be allocated as an indirect cost if it is also incurred as a direct cost for the same purpose and vice versa.

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

Indirect costs (also known as "facilities and administrative costs") defined at [2 CFR §200.56](#) are costs incurred for a common or joint purpose benefitting more than one cost objective, and not readily assignable to the cost objectives specifically benefitted, without effort disproportionate to the results achieved. Refer to [2 CFR §200.413](#) and [414](#) for additional information.

The Vermont Specialty Crop Block Grant Program cannot fund indirect costs; however, matching funds may be used to cover indirect costs. The salaries of administrative and clerical staff should typically be treated as indirect costs. However, charging these costs as direct costs may be appropriate where *all* of the following conditions are met:

- 1) administrative or clerical services are integral to a project or activity;
- 2) individuals involved can be specifically identified with the project or activity;

- 3) such costs are explicitly included in the budget or have the prior written approval of the Federal awarding agency; and
- 4) the costs are not also recovered as indirect costs.

Type of Organization	Typical Indirect Costs
Non-Profits	General administration and general expenses, such as the salaries and expenses of executive officers, personnel administration, and accounting, depreciation or use allowances on buildings and equipment, and the costs of operating and maintaining facilities.
Colleges and Universities	Equipment and capital improvements, operation and maintenance expenses, library expenses, general administration and general expenses, departmental administration, sponsored projects administration, student administration and services, depreciation and use allowances, and interest on debt associated with certain buildings.
State and Local Governments	State/local-wide central service costs, general administration of recipient department or agency, accounting and personnel services performed within recipient department or agency, depreciation or use allowances on buildings and equipment, and the costs of operating and maintaining facilities.

SELECTED COST CATEGORIES

Advisory Councils: Unallowable for costs incurred by advisory councils or committees.

Alcoholic Beverages: Allowable only when the costs are associated with enhancing the competitiveness of an eligible processed product (a product prepared or created for the purposes of promoting a specialty crop that requires other ingredients). A processed product is defined as a product that constitutes greater than 50% of the specialty crop by weight, exclusive of added water.

Buildings and Land – Construction: Unallowable for the acquisition of buildings, facilities, or land or to make additions, improvements, modifications, replacements, rearrangements, reinstallations, renovations or alterations of an existing building or facility (including site grading and improvement, and architecture fees). This also includes construction and construction-related materials, which may include, but are not limited to the purchase of building materials such as wood, nails, concrete, asphalt, roofing, gravel, sand, paint, insulation, drywall, or plumbing. A building is any permanent structure designed or intended for support, enclosure, shelter or protection of people, animals or property, and having a permanent roof supported by columns or walls.

Allowable for rental costs of land and building space. However, lease agreements to own (i.e., lease-to-own or rent-to-own) are not allowable. The lease or rental agreement must terminate at the grant's end.

Conferences: Allowable conference costs paid by the non-Federal recipient as a sponsor or host of the conference may include rental of facilities, speakers' fees, costs of meals (see **Meals** for restrictions), and refreshments, local transportation, and other items incidental to such conferences with the exception of entertainment costs that are unallowable. If registration fees are collected, the recipient must report fees as program income (See **Program Income**).

Allowable to rent a building or room for training; however, where appropriate, AMS encourages the use of technologies such as webinars, teleconferencing, or videoconferencing as an alternative to renting a building or a room. The recipient should use the most cost-effective facilities, such as State government conference rooms, if renting a building or a room is necessary.

Contingency Provisions: Unallowable for miscellaneous and similar rainy-day funds for events the occurrence of which cannot be foretold with certainty as to the time or intensity, or with an assurance of their happening. Unallowable for working capital for activities/items not already in place.

Contractual/Consultant Costs (Professional Services): Contractual/consultant costs are expenses associated with purchasing goods and/or procuring services performed by an individual or organization other than the recipient in the form of a procurement relationship.

Allowable for contractor/consultant employee rates that do not exceed the salary of a GS-15 step 10 Federal employee in the area (for more information, visit the [OPM website](#)). This does not include fringe benefits, travel, indirect costs, or other expenses. Any statutory limitations on indirect costs also apply to contractors and consultants. If rates exceed this amount, the recipient is required to justify the allowability of the cost aligning with [2 CFR §§ 200.317-326](#).

Contributions or Donations: Unallowable for contributions or donations, including cash, property, and services, made by the recipient to other entities. A non-Federal entity using grant funds to purchase food or services to donate to other entities and/or individuals is unallowable.

Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) Machines: Unallowable for the purchase/lease of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) EBT equipment. The USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) has existing funding to expand the availability of SNAP EBT equipment and services at farmers markets through the Farmers Market Coalition and State SNAP agencies.

Entertainment Costs: Unallowable for entertainment costs, defined in [2 CFR § 200.438](#), including amusement, diversion, and social activities and any costs directly

associated with such costs (such as bands, orchestras, dance groups, tickets to shows, meals, lodging, rentals, transportation, and gratuities).

Equipment is defined as tangible personal property (including information technology systems) having a useful life of more than one year and a per-unit acquisition cost that equals or exceeds the lesser of the capitalization level established by the non-Federal entity for financial statement purposes, or \$5,000.

- **Acquisition** cost means the cost of the asset including the cost to prepare the asset for its intended use. Acquisition cost for equipment is the net invoice price of the equipment, including the cost of any modifications, attachments, accessories, or auxiliary apparatus necessary to make it usable for its acquired purpose.
- **General Purpose Equipment** means equipment that is not limited to technical activities. Examples include office equipment and furnishings, modular offices, telephone networks, information technology equipment and systems, air conditioning equipment, reproduction and printing equipment, and motor vehicles.
- **Special Purpose Equipment** is equipment used only for research, scientific, or technical activities.

Unallowable for acquisition costs of general purpose equipment or lease agreements to own (i.e., lease-to-own or rent-to-own).

Allowable for rental costs of general purpose equipment. Vehicles may be leased, but not purchased. The lease or rental agreement must terminate at the end of the grant cycle. For vehicle and equipment leases or rentals with an acquisition cost that equals or exceeds \$5,000, rates should be in light of such factors as: rental costs of comparable vehicles and equipment, if any; market conditions in the area; alternatives available; and the type, life expectancy, condition, and value of the vehicle or equipment leased.

Allowable for acquisition costs and rental costs of special purpose equipment provided the following criteria are met: (1) necessary for the research, scientific, or other technical activities of the grant award; (2) not otherwise reasonably available and accessible; (3) the type of equipment is normally charged as a direct cost by the organization; (4) acquired in accordance with organizational practices; (5) must be used solely to meet the legislative purpose of the grant program and objectives of the grant award; (6) more than one single commercial organization, commercial product, or individual must benefit from the use of the equipment; (7) must not use special purpose equipment acquired with grant funds to provide services for a fee to compete unfairly with private companies that provide equivalent services; and (8) equipment is subject to the full range of acquisition, use, management, and disposition requirements under [2 CFR § 200.313](#) as applicable.

Equipment – Information Technology Systems: Unallowable for information technology systems having a useful life of more than one year and a per-unit acquisition

cost that equals or exceeds the lesser of the capitalization level established in accordance with GAAP by the recipient for financial statement purposes or \$5,000. Acquisition costs for software includes those development costs capitalized in accordance with GAAP.

Information technology systems include computing devices, ancillary equipment, software, firmware, and similar procedures, services (including support services), and related resources. Computing devices means machines used to acquire, store, analyze, process, and publish data and other information electronically, including accessories (or “peripherals”) for printing, transmitting and receiving, or storing electronic information. Examples of unallowable information technology systems include service contracts, operating systems, printers, and computers that have an acquisition cost of \$5,000 or more. See also special prohibition on the purchase of certain telecommunications and video surveillance described in [2 CFR § 200.216](#).

Allowable for website development, mobile apps, etc., that are not considered to be information technology systems, but rather social media applications.

Fines, Penalties, Damages and Other Settlements: Unallowable for costs resulting from violations of, alleged violations of, or failure to comply with, Federal, state, tribal, local or foreign laws and regulations.

Fundraising and Investment Management Costs: Unallowable for organized fundraising, including financial campaigns, solicitation of gifts and bequests, and similar expenses incurred to raise capital or obtain contributions, regardless of the purpose for which the funds will be used. This includes salaries of personnel involved in activities to raise capital.

Goods or Services for Personal Use: Unallowable for costs of goods or services for personal use of the recipient’s employees regardless of whether the cost is reported as taxable income to the employees.

Lobbying: Unallowable as defined in [2 CFR § 200.450](#).

Meals: Unallowable for business meals when individuals decide to go to lunch or dinner together when no need exists for continuity of a meeting. Such activity is considered an entertainment cost.

- Unallowable for breakfasts for conference attendees because it is expected these individuals will have sufficient time to obtain this meal on their own before the conference begins in the morning.
- Unallowable for meal costs that are duplicated in a participant’s per diem or subsistence allowances.
- Allowable for lunch or dinner meals if the costs are reasonable and a justification is provided that such activity maintains the continuity of the meeting and to do otherwise will impose arduous conditions on the meeting participants.

- Allowable for meals consumed while in official travel status. They are considered per diem expenses and should be reimbursed in accordance with the organization's established written travel policies.

Memberships, Subscriptions, and Professional Activity Costs: Unallowable for costs of membership in any civic or community organization.

Allowable for costs of membership in business, technical, and professional organizations.

Organization Costs: Unallowable for costs of investment counsel and staff and similar expenses incurred to enhance income from investments.

Allowable with prior approval for organization costs per [2 CFR § 200.455](#).

Participant Support Costs: Allowable for such items as stipends or subsistence allowances, and registration fees paid to or on behalf of participants or trainees (but not employees) in connection with approved conferences, training projects, surveys, and focus groups.

Political Activities: Unallowable for development or participation in political activities in accordance with provisions of the Hatch Act ([5 U.S.C. §§ 1501-1508](#) and [§§ 7324-7326](#)).

Pre-Award Costs: Allowable if such costs are necessary for efficient and timely performance of the scope of the project work. Such costs are allowable only to the extent that they would have been allowable if incurred after the date of the Federal award. If charged to the award, these costs must be charged to the initial budget period of the award, unless otherwise specified by AMS.

A VT SCBGP grantee may incur pre-award costs 90 calendar days before the Vermont Agency of Agriculture receives the Federal award. Expenses more than 90 days pre-award require prior approval. These costs and associated activities must be included in the grantee's project profile and budget. All pre-award costs incurred are at the potential recipient's risk. The incurrence of pre-award costs in anticipation of an award imposes no obligation on AMS or the VT SCBGP to award funds for such costs.

Printing and Publications: Allowable to pay the cost of preparing informational leaflets, reports, manuals, and publications relating to the project; however, the printing of hard copies is discouraged given the prevalence of electronic/virtual publication means. If charged to the award, these costs must be charged to the final budget period of the award, unless otherwise specified by AMS.

Rearrangement and Reconversion Costs: Allowable as direct costs with prior approval for special arrangements and alterations costs incurred specifically for the award. Rearrangement and reconversion costs are those incurred in restoring or rehabilitating the non-Federal entity's facilities to approximately the same condition

existing immediately before the start of the grant agreement, less costs related to normal wear and tear.

Salaries and Wages: Allowable as part of employee compensation for personnel services in proportion to the amount of time or effort an employee devotes to the grant-supported project or program during the period of performance under the Federal award, including salaries, wages, and fringe benefits. Such costs must be incurred under formally established policies of the organization, be consistently applied, be reasonable for the services rendered, and be supported with adequate documentation.

Salary and wage amounts charged to grant-supported projects or programs for personal services must be based on an adequate payroll distribution system that documents such distribution in accordance with generally accepted practices of like organizations. Standards for payroll distribution systems are contained in the applicable cost principles (other than those for for-profit organizations).

Unallowable for salaries, wages and fringe benefits for project staff who devote time and effort to activities that do not meet the legislated purpose of the grant program.

Example: Salaries and wages charged to the SCBGP for a farmers' market manager to manage and advertise a farmers market that includes non-specialty crop items are unallowable, while salaries and wages for personnel to conduct a cooking demonstration on how to prepare fruits and vegetables are allowable.

Selling and Marketing Costs – Promotion of an Organization's Image, Logo, or Brand Name: Unallowable for costs designed solely to promote the image of an organization, general logo, or brand.

- Promotional items could say "Buy Vermont Grown Apples" but not "Vermont Grown", which promotes Vermont generically.
- A promotional campaign to increase producer sales of "Vermont Grown Co-op Vegetables" is acceptable while increasing membership in "Vermont Grown Co-op" generally is not.

Selling and Marketing Costs – Promotion of Venues that do not Align with Grant Program Purpose: Unallowable for costs for promotion of specific venues, tradeshows, events, meetings, programs, conventions, symposia, seminars, etc. that do not align with the legislated purpose of the grant program.

Selling and Marketing Costs – Promotional Items, Gifts, Prizes, etc.: Unallowable for promotional items, swag, gifts, prizes, memorabilia, and souvenirs.

Selling and Marketing Costs – Coupons, Incentives or Other Price Discounts: Unallowable for costs of the value of coupon/incentive redemptions or price discounts (e.g., the \$5 value for a \$5 clip-out coupon).

Allowable for costs associated with printing, distribution, or promotion of coupons/tokens or price discounts (e.g., a print advertisement that contains a clip-out coupon) as long as they benefit more than a single program or organization.

Selling and Marketing Costs – Food for Displays, Tastings, Cooking

Demonstrations: Allowable for food for displays, tastings, and cooking demonstrations with prior approval.

Selling and Marketing Costs – General Marketing Costs: Unallowable for costs designed solely to promote the image of an organization, general logo, or general brand.

Allowable for costs designed to promote products that align with the purpose of the grant program.

Selling and Marketing Costs – Sponsorships: Unallowable for costs associated with sponsorships, defined as a form of advertising in which an organization uses grant funds to have its name and/or logo associated with certain events and where the organization does not necessarily know how the funds associated with sponsorship costs will be used.

Selling and Marketing Costs – Use of Meeting Rooms, Space, Exhibits that do not Align with Grant Program Purpose: Unallowable for costs associated with trade show attendance/displays, meeting room reservations, and/or any other displays, demonstrations, exhibits, or rental of space unless the activities specifically align with the purpose of the grant program. See **Conferences** for more information.

Selling and Marketing Costs – Cookbooks, Recipe Cards, Food Pairings: Unallowable for costs of separate complementary non-specialty crop products. A separate complementary non-specialty crop product means a product closely associated with a specialty crop product, the purchase of one encouraging consumers to buy the other (e.g., cheese and wine).

Allowable for costs promoting the specialty crops in processed products (products prepared or created for the purposes of promoting a specialty crop but that require other ingredients are considered a processed product). A processed product is defined as a product that consist of greater than 50% of the specialty crop by weight, exclusive of added water.

Supplies and Materials, Including Costs of Computing Devices: Allowable for costs incurred for materials, supplies, and fabricated parts necessary to carry out a Federal award. Purchased materials and supplies must be charged at their actual prices, net of applicable credits. Withdrawals from general stores or stockrooms should be charged at their actual net cost under any recognized method of pricing inventory withdrawals, consistently applied. Incoming transportation charges are a proper part of materials and supplies costs. Only materials and supplies actually used for the performance of a Federal award may be charged as direct costs.

A computing device is a supply if the acquisition cost is less than the lesser of the capitalization level established by the recipient for financial statement purposes or \$5,000, regardless of the length of its useful life. In the specific case of computing devices, charging as direct cost is allowable for devices that are essential and allocable, but not solely dedicated, to the performance of a Federal award. Where Federally-donated or furnished materials are used in performing the Federal award, such materials will be used without charge.

Training: Allowable when the training is required to meet the objectives of the project or program, including training that is related to Federal grants management.

Travel – Domestic: Allowable for domestic travel, when costs are limited to those allowed by formal organizational policy and the purpose aligns with the legislated purpose of the program.

Unallowable for travel costs for conferences, venues, tradeshow, events, meetings, programs, conventions, symposia, workshops, seminars, etc. that include non-specialty crop activities, such as farmers' market annual conferences and general marketing tradeshow, when these costs cannot be specifically identified and easily and accurately traced to activities that enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops.

Example: Travel costs for travel to a farmers market conference is generally unallowable, while travel to a vegetable food safety educational session is allowable.

Allowable travel cost of recipients that do not have formal travel policies and for-profit entities may not exceed those established by the Federal Travel Regulation, issued by [General Services Administration](#) (GSA), including the maximum per diem and subsistence rates prescribed in those regulations.

Travel – Government Officials: Allowable only with prior approval per [2 CFR § 200.444](#).

Travel – Foreign: Foreign travel includes any travel outside Canada, Mexico, the United States, and any United States territories and possessions. "Foreign travel" for a governmental unit located in a foreign country means travel outside that country. Projects must provide justification for foreign travel. Search the Foreign Agricultural Service database of GAIN reports to ensure that proposals will not duplicate information that already exists.

DISCLOSURES

CIVIL RIGHTS & EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and USDA civil rights regulations and policies, USDA and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity. To file a program discrimination complaint, contact Abbey Willard, Agricultural Development Division Director, at abbey.willard@vermont.gov or 802-272-2885.

LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY ACCOMMODATION

Applicants with limited English proficiency may request translation assistance by contacting the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets at AGR.Helpdesk@vermont.gov or 802-828-2430.

PROGRAM SUBJECT TO CHANGE

As of November 20, 2023—the publication date of this Request for Applications—USDA has not provided the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets or any other state department of agriculture with a 2024 SCBGP Request for Applications or Terms and Conditions. Program changes, such as clarifications and revisions to allowable costs and activities, may occur with the publication of USDA's 2024 Request for Applications or Terms and Conditions. The Vermont Agency of Agriculture will advise applicants of any relevant program changes. The Vermont Agency of Agriculture and all awards granted under this program will be subject to the USDA's 2024 Request for Applications and Terms and Conditions.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets seeks your feedback on this Request for Applications (RFA). We will consider these comments when we develop the next Vermont Specialty Crop Block Grant Program RFA. Submit written stakeholder comments via email to AGR.SpecialtyCrops@vermont.gov, and specify that you are responding to the Fiscal Year 2024 Request for Proposals.